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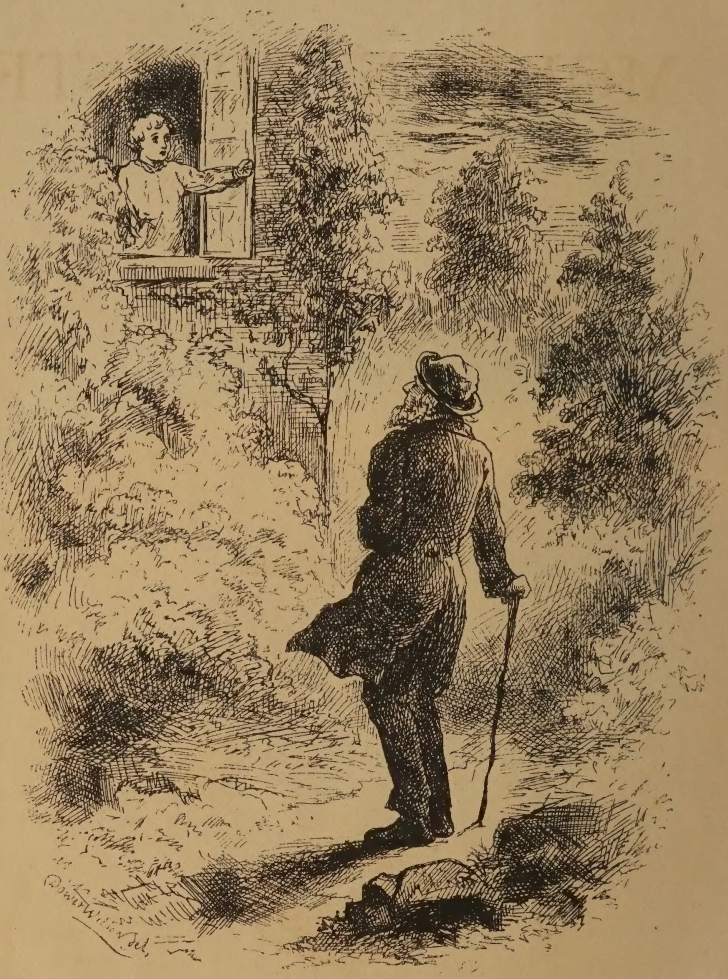

"GOOD-NIGHT, DEAR GRANDFATHER, GOOD-NIGHT!"—[*See Page* 127.]

The Cheveley Novels.

W. B. Tindall
18th Octr

A MODERN MINISTER.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE,
1878.

TO

CHARLES CHEVELEY, Esq.,

IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION OF UNVARYING KINDNESS AND SYMPATHY,
I DEDICATE

A MODERN MINISTER,

THE INITIAL WORK OF A SERIES I PROPOSE, WITH YOUR PERMISSION,
TO ENTITLE

THE CHEVELEY NOVELS.

THE AUTHOR.

THE CHARACTERS.

IN THE MINISTRY.

The Rev. Westley Garland	The Minister.
The Rev. Robert Evelyn	His Curates.
The Rev. Spencer Webb	
The Rev. William Arden	Pastor of a Village Church in Yorkshire.
Dr. Christopher Cricket	A Nonconformist Divine.
The Rev. Jacob Jones	Of Pisgah Tabernacle.

IN THE BLUE-BOOK.

Lady Helen Lindon	Sovereign in her own Right.
Lady Guilmere	A gracious Gentlewoman.
The Duchess of Mainwaring	A Leader of *Ton.*
The Countess of Comdarlington	A Martyr to Languor.
Hon. Mrs. Frederic Glover	Champion of Woman's Rights.
Harold, Lord Lindon	Of Sleperton Manor.
Frank, Lord Ellerby	A Patron of the Fine Arts.
The Duke of Mainwaring	Of the "Four-in-hand Club."
The Earl of Comdarlington	With Taste for the Antique.
Lord Darrell	Old Red Sandstone Period.
Sir Kinnaird Dalton	A wealthy Baronet.
Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger	Of Cheffinger.
Sir Horace Vivian	A Victim to the Proprieties.
Sir Charles Neville	The Votary of Fashion.
Beresford Travers, Esq.	Of Beresford Court.
Ernest Bruce, Esq.	A Landed Proprietor.
Elmore Elsynge, Esq.	The Heir to Froggypond.

IN THE PROFESSIONS.

Greville Lovelace	A Sculptor.
William Arden	Qualifying for the Bar.
George Percival	An Author.
Dr. Nichols	A kind-hearted Medical Man.
Dr. Hunter	The leading Practitioner of Seaborough.
Mr. Penfold	A Solicitor.

IN PRIVATE LIFE.

Ashton St. Aubyn	Gentleman, of the House upon the Cliff.
Mr. Herbert Garston	A Hunter of dangerous Game.
Mr. Samuel Percival	A retired Bookseller.
Mr. Jeremiah Grannet	Of Art-ful Tendencies.
J. Arthur Anderson, Esq.	An inveterate Miser.
Rehoboam Gripper, Esq.	A Bank Director.
Geoffrey Hamilton	Of the Bishop's House.

IN BOYHOOD.

Arthur	The gentle Page.
Lorry Vincent	"The Boy with the lovely Face."
Bertie Evans	Son of a Congregational Minister.

IN GIRLHOOD.

Lena St. Aubyn	Princess of the Cliff.
Ella Travers	The Snowflake.
Rose Blake	Sweetest of Southern Roses.
Amy	Fairy Dancer in Spectacle and Ballet.
Violet Hamilton	Bright Spirit of a Bookworm's Retreat.
Constance Evelyn	A young Beauty of Devon.
Edith Lessie	The Daughter of Laïs.

MARRIED LADIES.

Mrs. Joseph Blake	A Lady of Infinite Style.
Mrs. Major Howard	Of many accomplishments.
Mrs. Warburton	A famous Actress starring in the Provinces as Kate Vandaleur.
Mrs. Lurch	The Lady with a Brougham.
Mrs. Josiah Bubb	The Silk-mercer's Lady.
Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle	Of the Fish Sauce Manufactory.
Mrs. Samuel Percival	Of Queen Street, Paddington.
Mrs. Thomas Percival	Of the Warren Farm.

SPINSTERS.

Aunt Penelope	The Goddesses.
Aunt Hebé	
Aunt Phyllis	
Aunt Minerva	
Aunt Diana	
Aunt Vesta	
Aunt Hermione	
Aunt Circe	
Aunt Dido	
Aunt Lena	
Aunt Thetis	
Aunt Iphigenia	
Aunt Evadne	
Miss Ruth Lessie	A Farmer's Sister.
Miss Turner	A Pew-opener.
Miss Charlotte Caddie	Lady Superior of the Institution of Scandal.
Miss Merino Bobbin	The Lady in need of Protection.
Gabrielle	"An almost ideal Character, but sufficiently human to be interesting."

LADIES ABOUT WHOM THERE IS A DOUBT.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich	A Maiden of gushing Pleasantries.
Hortense Brandon	The exceedingly quiet Person.
Mrs. Vincent	An elegant Schemer.
Mrs. Lessie	Erring, but a Mother.
Madame Reignard	Teacher of Deportment.
Mrs. Maneater	Of the Royal Menagerie.

WIDOWS.

Mrs. Lionel Travers	Whose History closely concerns The Minister.
Mrs. Garston	The Relict of a thorough English Gentleman.
Mrs. Evans	A Congregational Minister's Widow.
Mrs. Elsynge	The Mistress of Froggypond Hall.
Mrs. Westwood	Mr. Bruce's Housekeeper.
Mrs. Sanderson	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper in Brighton.
Mrs. Mellerton	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper at Hawkingdean.
Mrs. Robertson	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper in London.
Mrs. Bobbin	Of Bobbin's Drapery Emporium.

IN TRADE.

Joseph Blake	Chemist and Druggist, Brighton.
Laban Wix	A Pawnbroker.
Thomas Percival	A Hertfordshire Farmer.
John Lessie	A Sussex Yeoman.
Reuben Smith	Miller and Bailiff.
Mr. Simcox	Curator of Seaborough Museum.
Mr. Lurch	Tonic Ale Brewer.
Ebenezer Wriggle	Fish Sauce and Pickle Manufacturer to the Royal Family.
Josiah Bubb	Silk-mercer by Appointment.
Edward Summers	Vendor of Books, Fancy Articles, and Photographs.

Uriah Sticky	Committee for the Testimonial.	Grocer.
Bacchus Bin		Wine-merchant.
Silverside		Jeweler.
Panel		Coach-builder.
Easel		Artist.

IN BOHEMIA.

Dickson Cheffinger	Not so Mad as he seems.
Andrew Wilson	A Violinist.
Jimmy Ringdom	Of Ringdom and Tanner's Hippodrome.
Billy Tanner	
"*Walter Gordon*"	A Deserter from the Circus.
Boneless Joey of Japan	Likewise of the Amphitheatre.
Major Wellesley Howard	Of uncertain military Antecedents.
Jael-Ishmael	King of the Gypsy Tribes in England.

IN RASCALITY.

Noel Barnard	Surnamed Mephistopheles.
Bartholomew Rolf	The Utility Villain upon a novel Principle.
Stephen Miles	Chief Clerk at the Bank.
Coke O'Connor	Attorney at Law.
John Beech	One of the Fancy, and Dealer in Foreign Birds.

IN SERVICE.

Simmons	Confidential Servant to Sir Kinnaird Dalton.
Hammond	Sir Kinnaird's Valet.
Williams	Faithful Servants at the House upon the Cliff.
Martha Saxe	
Brown	A Yorkshire Fisherman.

A MODERN MINISTER.

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OPENS IN BRIGHTON.

Joseph Blake, seated at his desk before a monstrous tome of Latin science, ever and anon directed a keen business glance over the area of his shop, where several fashionably dressed purchasers were selecting the toilet elegancies and other trifles which add to the attraction of modern chemistry. Taken throughout, perhaps, this shop of Joseph Blake's was one of the handsomest of its kind to be found in Brighton: an eminently genteel shop, which a duchess might have entered, and where the uninviting odor of drugs was indistinguishable beneath a pleasant cloud of essences and perfumes. Nevertheless, Joseph Blake possessed a great prestige for the excellence of his medicaments, and the doctors treasured the belief that their prescriptions, carefully prepared under the personal supervision of the proprietor, were here made up with a scrupulous care and excellence deserving of their confidence.

Joseph Blake was highly esteemed in the town, not alone for his business qualities and general integrity, but for a genial, kindly benevolence, and a grace of manner as appreciable in the man of business as in the peer. But this business was a sore point with Mrs. Blake, who had come of professional people, and had very nice notions about caste. Never was this good lady more put out than when some unfortunate wight chanced to speak of Joseph as a tradesman. "I would have you to know," she would say, "that the chemical profession is not a trade, and that a man must first become a gentleman before he can become a chemist." This generally settled the matter for the natural life of the person convinced. As a point of interest, no one ever presumed to argue with Mrs. Blake upon any subject, it being a principle of that lady's policy never to give in, and to develop the aggressive as she warmed to the argument. They had one child, a little daughter, and of so charming a disposition, it was tacitly admitted by their friends that Nelly Rose was "papa's own child."

Upon the afternoon when the story opens Mr. Blake was rather more absorbed than usual in the fathoming of the technical *vade-mecum* before him, a prescription of an eminent London physician demanding his instant attention. Lady Guilmere, resident in one of the chief aristocratic squares, had been dangerously ill, until it became imperative to invoke the skill of some great physician. This prescription was the result of that consultation, and Mr. Blake was deep in its direction when a tall, singular-looking personage entered the shop, and, marching past customers and assistants, made straight for the sanctum of the master, slightly to Mr. Blake's annoyance.

"Mr. Blake, I presume?" the tall stranger said, leaning his arms on the glass and mahogany screen to the desk, and peering over at the chemist with the most basilisk-like eyes the latter thought he had ever seen.

"That is my name, Sir!" a little irritably, for the chemist, as became one privileged to write *Medicinæ Baccalaureus* and *Societatis Medicæ Londinensis Socius* after plain *Joseph Blake*, especially disliked an interruption of this kind when deep in pharmaceutics.

"Glad to have found you at home, Mr. Blake; proud to make your acquaintance. Any friend or relative of Joshua Blake commands—will ever command—my undivided regard."

"You know my brother, Sir?"

"He is my particular friend. I hold a letter of introduction; permit me, Sir—"

The stranger, whom Joseph thought uncommonly like Mephistopheles, handed the chemist a letter.

"My brother was never very choice of acquaintance even when in England, and now he has settled in Australia I suppose he meets with all sorts."

With which innocent remark, not noticing the playful shrugging of the shoulders by the other, Joseph Blake ran his eye down the letter.

"Adelaide, S. Australia.

"Dear Brother Joseph,—Allow me to commend to the notice of yourself and friends Mr. Noel Barnard, a truly worthy and estimable gentleman, who hails from Perth settlement, Swan River, from whence he brings unexceptionable testimonials. He has been a considerable traveller, and is now bound for Europe; he is very entertaining company. I take occasion to send by him a little case of snakes for your drawing-room, which accept with love, from your affectionate brother, Joshua."

"Have you the case with you, Mr.—Mr. Barnard?"

"At my hotel, Sir. The man shall bring it down to you."

"Now I was going to beg you would not trouble, for I really have no room for curiosities. Pray keep it in remembrance of my brother, who seems to hold you in such particular esteem. And now, how can I serve you? My capacity is very limited, for I am so occupied with business that I get but little out-door recreation."

"No consequence, my dear Sir; there is nothing you can do to oblige me, much as I am sure you would wish to do so. But I thought I would give you a look in, as I am here for a day or two. A charming town, Sir; does credit to your municipal government!"

Now this was Joseph's weak point; and, pluming himself, he admitted it did credit to his brother councilors, and invited the gentleman with Australian credentials into the back parlor to take a glass of sherry.

With a polite bow to one or two of the customers known to him, Mr. Blake passed through the shop, followed by the grave-looking stranger.

"Very snug, upon my word," rubbing his hands and looking round Mr. Blake's comfortable little retreat.

Then, over sherry, the gentleman from Australia discovered it was Saturday, and "By-the-bye, where do you recommend for a nice quiet service to-morrow? I admire a brilliant preacher. I think the poet what's-his-name says, 'a good man eloquent!' It seems to be the fashion now for every body to run after this Mr. Garland of yours. How ever did you contrive to secure so bright and shining a light for the provinces?"

"Well, although I've attended at the church since and before Mr. Garland's time, that is more than I can tell you. I have reason to believe this is his first charge, but I am not sure, and I fancy others are content to trouble as little as myself. We are fortunate to obtain so gifted a preacher; we know the nomination to have been correct, we leave the rest."

The gentleman with credentials looked different ways out of the corners of his eyes, and, by way of one corner, saw an assistant approaching, and helped himself to another glass of sherry, permitting the biscuit to crumble slowly into the glass, as though each crumb were a thought, and fishing after these with the major portion as deliberately as though stringent issues weighed upon the sport.

Mr. Blake looked up inquiringly upon the entrance of his assistant.

"Lady Guilmere's servant, Sir, to know if the prescription is made up."

"Just say it shall be sent at once. Many people in the shop?"

"Not so many, Sir. Mr. Garland has just come in."

"Fortunate," said the gentleman; "I shall be able to take a glance at your celebrity. Er—which college did you say? Went to college myself; perhaps we may have met. It is very interesting renewing old acquaintance—very!"

He thereupon stole a hasty inspection—the chemist rather amused at the possibility of this gaunt and shaggy wanderer having been upon cultivation-par with the elegant and refined Westley Garland.

Now it happened at times to be Mrs. Blake's pleasure to enter the shop much as any other grand lady might, and as she herself was in the habit of doing in towns where unknown, and with much majesty buy a pennyworth of lozenges for her little girl, while leisurely examining the handsome costumes ranged beside her husband's counter. Mrs. Blake thus entered at the time of the Rev. Mr. Garland's purchase of a box of *eau-de-Cologne*, and looking from the counter with nervous abruptness peculiar to him, the preacher found himself confronted by this prepossessing lady and her exceedingly pretty child. His gaze rested but an instant upon the countenance of the mother; upon that of the child it dwelt with an expression of indescribable pain. His back was turned to the red-curtained window of the parlor, his face was toward the sea. A look came over the eyes so sad, its eloquence, without the pleading of that voice which thrilled all hearts, would have moved one to tears. He recovered himself in an instant, and continued the selection of his articles.

Mrs. Blake, seating herself with regal stateliness, looked full at this notable. She had long wished to "catch him out," as she termed it, and now to have this pleasure in their own shop was indeed a red-letter event. To hear the voice that was driving her sex to distraction at her very elbow so set the good woman quivering that her husband, had he seen her, would have immediately administered a composing restorative. And what a melodious, yet tenderly toned, voice it was, subdued from the sonorous expression of public utterance! How it thrilled one! Even little Rose looked up winningly in the great man's face, and their eyes met, and Rose ceased her thoughtless prattle, becoming grave, oddly grave for years below their teens; the mourning and hungering look haunted her.

"Your popular divine looks rather pale, Mr. Blake. Does not enjoy good rest, perhaps?"

"I think he overstudies, Sir. Mr. Garland is an active reformer, and leaves no stone unturned in the execution of his noble purpose. I fear he is working himself to death."

"I suppose he indulges, like the rest of us, in a little medicine now and then—something in the way of opiates, or the wherewith to counteract the nervous shiverings some overtaxed people are troubled with?"

The chemist looked up very much surprised.

"I declare, Sir, if you had been in my place, you could not have described the symptoms with greater accuracy—"

"I know all about it, bless you. Look what I used to go through at college. Overstrain, Sir, overstrain; it's an undue-pressure age, an era of high speed, a— Beg pardon, is that a moth on my hat? Great objection to those things. Perhaps you'll pass my hat, for I must be going, and I'm delaying you. So pleased to have seen you—any friend of dear Joshua's;" and with six grave strides the singular individual walked through the shop, brushed past the professional man's wife, and peered, in passing, under the brim of the Minister's hat; but he, so intent upon other things, took not the remotest notice, did not move even by a respiration; in fact, was as one petrified. Mrs. Blake broke the spell in the slightly prosaic style of, "Let me have another pennyworth of the peppermint lozenges."

What a good thing it is that there are some of this class of people about! how their rude bluntness often relieves a breathless pain!

Mr. Blake came into the shop, bowing with much deference to the Minister, who gracefully gave his hand to this member of his congregation, the same thereupon introducing his wife and daughter. Mr. Garland appearing visibly moved, the chemist said, kindly,

"I fear you are not very well to-day, Sir. Take care for the sake of your people. Will you step in and rest a while?"

"If you do not mind, I shall feel pleasure," bowing with appreciation as gracious as it was sincere. Mr. Garland was conducted to their drawing-room, and he took occasion to explain, in low and trembling tones, to Joseph:

"The sight of your little girl revived an old sorrow; I have lost one whom she resembles feature for feature. I have suffered much in my time, Mr. Blake."

"I somehow thought so."

"And you know how easily wounds may be re-opened. But I have overcome the temporary weakness, and shall always see your girl with strange pleasure; let her come to me and make friends. If you are willing, I shall be more than pleased to see her at my house; I shall think it kind of you."

This was said so simply, yet with such earnest eagerness, Joseph Blake assented with the utmost cordiality.

"I am sure you are quite welcome to Rose whenever you like to have her; it is very good to take this notice of our child. I beg you will send her home whenever troublesome. Take care not to spoil her, Sir, children are so quickly spoiled; but you will excuse me, I have an immediate prescription to prepare. Can you tell me how Lady Guilmere is to-day, Sir, if you have called?" Lady Guilmere was one of the most devoted attendants at the fashionable temple in which Westley Garland officiated. A slight flush rose to the pale cheek while he replied,

"I fear her ladyship is sinking fast." Upon hearing which the professional man hurriedly left the room, begging Mr. Garland to await his return, and sending Rose in to him immediately. This act the other noticed, although passing no remark: little deeds are magnified into great favors by the sensitive and the suffering.

Rose was not timid or even hesitative, but, kitten in arms, walked straight up to their pastor, and with delightful ingenuousness offered him her hand.

"And we are to be friends, Rose?"

"I have always hoped you would speak to me some day."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I felt I should love you. I look for Sunday's coming, and welcome the day as I never used to do. Somehow it is not like the same church when you begin to read or preach."

"Am I so very irreverent?"

"Oh no; but we have been used to such different ministers—dull, and giving one the fidgets—I always went to sleep. But I don't sleep now; the morning does not seem long enough."

A pleased smile played about the Minister's mouth; it was more grateful flattery than any heard in Brighton. Perhaps he recalled two other pretty lips that had aforetime praised his reading.

Then suddenly the smile faded, and his face assumed an expression of pain.

"Noel Barnard here?" he thought. "There is now no safety; recognized by him! I believed my very publicity would prove a safeguard. And that man must cross my path like some despoiling influence. Is he destined to dog and betray me unto the end?"

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CHAPTER II.

A MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

The Rev. Westley Garland was called a great preacher; and if wide-spread fame, a wealthy, well-filled church, and praise on all hands be greatness, assuredly the public voice spake truth. His portraits were in North Street and the King's Road, his books in the libraries, his autographs in the first of albums. Somebody had seen him in St. Paul's at a week-day service, and forthwith held to the opinion, manifoldly circulated, that Mr. Garland, although his church was filled solely by his own matchless eloquence, was at heart in sympathy with the High-Church party; but then, somebody also had seen him at a children's service in Queen Square Congregational Chapel, and these clashed at the tea table; a more startling revelation yet coming from a third, who knew to a dead certainty that he had sat all night beside a poor sick woman who sold shell-boxes on the beach, and was a Roman Catholic. This had to be reconciled with the fact that Mr. Garland's housekeeper had been seen taking a basket of good things to the dwelling of a poor woman who had been in better circumstances, but who—was a Baptist.

To chronicle correctly, of all the clergy who had supplied Brighton tea tables with gossip, Westley Garland was the most provoking man; he was so mysterious, so handsome, so wealthy, so talented, so unmarried! He gave a Dramatic Reading at the Dome for a charity: the tickets, albeit a guinea, were caught up the day of the advertisement. Such a scramble was never known, nor such a reading; and for once in a way ticket-holders admitted they had received more than their guinea's worth.

He was the beau divine of good society, and people swore by him in circles of culture and refinement; yet somehow little children lisped his name, and looked for his coming on their way to school. He puzzled, and worried, and fretted, and moved, and for the comparatively short time he had been in Brighton he had caused more speculation than any man before him.

They came upon him in such odd places: he had been seen talking with circus people, all among grooms and horses; with fishermen down by the boats near the Old Pier; with ploughers on the broad height of Downland; with the rough crew frequenting a low bowling-saloon; at midnight, using gentle entreaty with the outcast; in startling places, at unseasonable and, as some said, unreasonable times.

But it was very strange: look the girls their hardest, saint-like and devout, over the hymn-books, he seemed as unimpressionable as marble; went straight on with the marvelous eloquence, the grace of thought, the music of language; every attitude and gesture a kingly study, and—a witness of sublime indifference to the blandishments of the sirens. Then they commenced picking him to pieces, were sure there was something wrong, would give any thing to learn a little of his past. Where did he come from? For, although nobody noticed it at the time, all being done in the orthodox fashion, he had sprung up like a mushroom in the midst of them. They recollected the white-haired incumbent's death, and the lank curate's doing duty, and then this handsome fellow preaching once or twice in a gown splendid as a bishop's, and with a sad sweet smile enchanting as Charles the First's; and forthwith the pews entered for the prize. But Abelard was insensible, and Héloïse embroidered her offertory bags in vain. Certain it is, no efforts within the limits of decency were wanting to induce Mr. Garland to alter his estate; but he was calmly unconscious of the commotion. His winning, affable smile won many hearts among the elders also, and the tender thrill of his voice fell deep into many souls, who told no word to others of his spell upon their lonely lives.

And it was known that the grasp of his hand was cordial alike for rich and for poor; there was none of the approved coolness at contact with the unfortunate. So he came to live in the hearts of the poor also; and these stole ashamedly into the free seats and north pole of the galleries, and, hanging upon his utterance, thought the Word came with sweeter force from his lips than any other's.

The crowd he drew around him knew but his strength; rulers must have no weakness. Yet a face of not more than twelve sea-side summers had power to shake him like a reed. Some called the pathos which at times moved the Church, or the sensitive part of the Church, to tears, Art, when it was the cry wrung from his very soul, and, place and people all forgotten, he was alone with his God.

Mr. Garland was assisted by two curates; one a blonde, seraph-like creature, with mild, indefinite manners, and halting, unpleasant speech. He was there before Mr. Garland came, but the latter could not behave cruelly to any one, although the young man often made him creep in the communion chair. Garland was a splendid reader, and it naturally grated upon his sensibilities more than upon others'. The second was a pale, thoughtful man, of middle age, with a face lined with traces of old care. He had come to Garland in bad condition, and but one and sevenpence in pocket, but with such a weird, pitiful tale! Nobody was any the wiser, and shortly afterward the gentleman commenced duty at a hundred and twenty the year. And be sure he was a gentleman of family and University degree; for Westley Garland was one of the few who kept faith with his God, his fellow, and himself. Great friendship sprang up between these two—on one side arisen of gratitude and a species of loving reverence rather rare in this world; on the other, the product of interest and sympathy. The card of this last-named curate we present: it was—

Rev. Spencer Webb.

Having nothing to do with the other young man, we drop him out of the book.

One of the Northamptonshire Webbs, people said who knew nothing about it; for the Rev. Spencer was as much connected with the said Webbs as with the White Bears.

One evening, at eight-o'clock service, Mr. Garland was sitting within the communion rails while the Rev. Spencer read prayers. Of course the place was very full, for the popular favorite was expected to preach, and some very nice people, as Nelly Rose put it, were poked into the corner; but even as those who enter the latest often get the high places, so upon this evening the tall man of the chemist's shop, whom the Minister had spoken of as Noel Barnard, was conducted by the worthy pew-opener of that aisle to the Minister's own seat. This was on line with the pulpit, in full view of the altar, where a man sat, stately as one of the old Northern kings, with a statuesque poet face that might have caused the swart daughters of Israel to crimson to the glow of the cactus, had he been monarch of the troubled soul before whom David stood shoulder to the harp. Thus, when Mr. Garland walked from the inclosure to the pulpit, and, in process of removing his pocket-handkerchief from the breast pocket, dropped a letter on the altar stairs, that accident was remarked by the said Mr. Barnard, who had his eye on it therefrom, meditating possessing himself of the missive. In this he was forestalled by the same amiable and precise maiden lady whose province and privilege it was to conduct Mr. Garland's admirers to their seats, feeling all the time, and that very honestly, that never one of them entertained as profound regard as did herself for the brilliant orator. So long had she played the somnambulist under his predecessor, this man's rhetoric, like a torrent of flowers, was a revelation, and thrilled the old heart as she had thought it would never more be thrilled in this world.

Now while Miss Turner stood by the door receiving the smiling "Good-night" of those who knew her, the tall man paused on his way out.

"What are pews in this church?"

"Guinea the quarter, Sir; twelve shillings in the gallery."

"Ah, very good. I must try one or two other positions before deciding. Don't live altogether in Brighton. Should not be a very regular attendant. Get 'em cheaper, I s'pose, on that 'count? By-bye, are views published of the church? Fine interior, va-ry!" (looking round with apparent interest).

"Yes, Sir; I've some on sale at my shop, if you like to step round. It's closed. Turner, Preston Terrace. But I'm just going home."

"You are very good. 'Lead on, Macduff!'"

"Margaret Turner, Sir, Stationery and Berlin Wools."

Miss Turner let herself in, and the tall man had to stoop. He remained in the passage (they had entered at the private door of the little mart, over which a card with Apartments wooed the public to a closer inspection), while his conductress procured a light. She then requested him to walk into the sitting-room—a comfortable, orderly, clean, very-much-antimacassared chamber, with a fine moonlight view of a back yard and two cats on the wall. Miss Turner laid down half a dozen hymn-books she carried, drew down the blind, lighted the gas in the shop, and—

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping this way, if you please, Sir?"

The views were in a line under a glass case; the stranger stooped, dangled a glass, passed along the line with military precision of a Field-Marshal reviewing, and—

"Va-ry fine interior, va-ry!"

Miss Turner waited, blew her nose, tapped with her finger-nails on the glass, and adjusted a stray curl. Still the stranger did not attempt to make any purchase.

"By-the-bye, got 'ny portraits of—of—"

"Mr. Garland?"

"Exactly! my friend Garland—going to call—

pleased to take any commission for you—catch the old boy at supper!"

And now Noel Barnard waited for the letter; fish didn't bite.

"Thank you, Sir; we never trouble Mr. Garland about business. The curates or churchwardens—"

"Just so—not to detain you—don't care much for these views—misty rather—bad light. Got 'ny paper—note—letter—drop a line—clerical friend?"

Miss Turner did not take it, and with quiet business tact placed a box of assorted writing-paper before the customer, who looked at the quality, shook his head, and held it up to the gas.

"Thought so; worse than sugar-paper—could ha' swore to th' feel—never buy this fellow's—pen catches—got 'ny envelopes?"

Miss Turner brought forth, wondering but patient, as became a pew-opener.

"Not quite the size, you see—as I fold my note tripoint, the corners get bent in—these ridiculous things—show you the kind—got one in pocket"—(ferreting)—"bless my soul, it's gone! Haven't picked up a letter, have ye?"

This was a *coup d'état*, and the steely eyes of the stranger glittered like a trap. The sallow-faced little woman with the bands of gray hair, just pulled a linen cuff straight to the wrist, and quietly replied,

"Articles found in the church are taken to the vestry. I have not been that side of the counter."

The gentleman took up his gloves and umbrella.

"Can't tell you how sorry I am that you haven't what I want; be a better customer another time. All in the way of business, you know. Thanks, thanks! I'll find the door."

He was gone. Just as quietly and patiently she replaced the boxes, a still smile, little more than the flicker of a rush-light, playing at the corners of the dried-up mouth.

"He saw that dropped," she said to herself, and took the letter from her pocket. She turned out the gas in the shop, and kissed the letter in the dark; then went into the little room, all among the antimacassars, and carefully, lovingly, reverently, placed it in her work-box; not, mark you, with ulterior intention of ever reading it. It was a foolish dream—a foolish old faithful heart. She had something now more than the haunting recollection of the face—something once his, carried about below the faultless cravat, and she tripped down to see about supper, returning shortly with quite a chirp, and a cheerful look at the dry bit of cheese; and then—must take one more kiss as a sort of grace—and daintily, lingeringly, as prolonging the pleasure, lifting the lid of the old mother's work-box, to drop it like a guillotine severing the thread of her little dream. The letter had disappeared!

"He has been back," muttered Miss Turner, with a sardonic composure, scalping a corner of the fossil cheese. "I should much wonder if that party's principles are founded upon the Prayer-Book; mayhap he belongs to the Dissenters. I shall know him next time he comes to ours. Anyway, I think Mr. Garland should be told of this. I'll put on my bonnet again and call at Mr. Webb's."

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE THAT WAS BOARDED ROUND.

It was built high upon a Yorkshire cliff, open to the expanse of German Ocean; sea-gulls alone disturbed its privacy and stared in at the windows with wondering eyes, so tried by storms the deathly quiet of the place confused their reckoning altogether; it stood bared to wind and weather, but solid as the rock upon which the owner had erected his lonesome castle. It was grand to hear the winds sweep through the shrubberies at night, and beset the craggy wall as though an army of demons were scaling it with the lightning at their flanks.

At the best this island is a small plot, but there are queer sites about it upon which to build houses. This builder seemed to have chosen the most unlikely. It had its uses, however, as many a northern fisherman knew, when on dark nights of storm the strange man had all the windows aglow with waxen tapers, till the mansion shone for leagues like a beacon.

From the shore—the sea line—the house was inaccessible; at the back a devious bramble-enclustered pathway, which only the initiated would ever have traced, conducted to the strong iron door giving ingress to the boarded court-yard and gardens. The house was built on the brink of the cliff; the boundary encircled the whole of the steep *plateau*. Where on earth the men had come from, or how brought their materials for building the place, was more than any body could say. No one had seen it in process of construction, but suddenly a Filey mariner noticed the thing—a habitation, chimney, gable, tower, springing from among the dusky trees—and he told his mates, shoresmen of Flamborough, Bridlington, Whitby, Saltburn, and Redcar; they in time saw the house and wondered, saw the birds hovering the dizzy depths, and the drapery of flowers trailing from summit to basement. They became used to it: some singular and lonely man retreated from the world that had used him unkindly, perhaps; and by night, when the red and yellow gleam was on their waters, it became companionable, and they grew to bless its sentinel break of the long, dark line.

The house on the cliff was tenanted by one Ashton St. Aubyn, gentleman; of high lineage and refined tastes, but with a singular antipathy to society, either of his order or of the humbler classes. Something of a poet, more of an artist, he lived a strangely peaceful and ideal life, his young daughter his sole companion, if we except a favorite hound. From the extraordinary care taken in inclosing his domain, it would seem he anticipated the intrusion which he shunned—a groundless fear, for no living soul had disturbed the serenity of the house on the cliff.

It was a small establishment: St. Aubyn; Lena; Mrs. Brandon, her governante and companion; Jordan, a maid; Martha Saxe, cook and housekeeper; St. Aubyn's man, Williams; and a domestic.

Lena St. Aubyn was a beauty of fifteen, with a purely classical face, aristocratic in the region of the mouth, with a certain haughtiness derived of her race, yet withal ever lovable-looking, gentle, and delicate: so delicate, the veins mapped the snowy skin, and the fall of a rose-bud would crimson the shoulders. Vivacious, *ingénue*, girlish as when little frocks bobbed the pretty knees, this companion of the lonely student seemed the flower of the home, the sunshine in that castle on the crags; princess too she was—woe betide the servitor that dare dispute her word! It was a pleasant sight, the sportive girl, graceful as some antelope, haunting that wilderness of garden, or reading below the shadow of the trees that grew thick as in African jungles, as solitary, as desolate. Birds came to the crumbs she scattered, conies trooped to her feet, the wild goat browsed in her path, sheep of the rock came nibbling to the fence and paused, sleepily listening to the *chanson* trilled from her seat near the brier-wood and honeysuckle.

It is a rare thing to see a face you feel would love you as you would love it; yet this was the face that had grown with the flowers of that garden above the sea.

Sometimes when on the grass at the cliff's edge—she delighted in this dangerous vantage-point when she could escape espionage—she would trail to the brink like some swart girl of the red-skins, lean a graceful head over until the sweep of hair became woven with weed, and watch the breakers at wild play below. Wheeling birds would look in the eyes, like windows, where they saw the clouds again, "the deep, unutterable eyes with down-falling eyelids, full of dreams and slumber," and think them precious stones perchance, or stars.

And in a sumptuous chamber where tawny leathers and dead graven gold, old paintings, leopard skins, and massive ebony and silver blended in Roman splendor, there St. Aubyn passed the sultry summer noon; his hundred treasures displayed to charm the world-sated, beauty-wearied eyes that knew but a pleasure of all life's pageant—his daughter's company. Not any one in England had known her mother. He had come from Eastern lands. A lady who had advertised in the *Times* received reply to meet a gentleman at Hatchett's, Dover Street. Willing, suave, amiable, motherly, clever, she seemed the person he required to take partial care of his young—very young daughter; but this important member of the house did not immediately appear, indeed, not until the house on the cliff was in order, and master and governante there domiciled. Lena was a curious little kitten at that day; all frolics and quaintly pretty ways that would creep into one's heart whether one would or no. Over floors of the big rooms pattered the small feet, music that lessened with years, grew grave, sobered, serene; confined to tracks of the garden under breath of the mighty winds that scattered the bloom and foam, and beat the broad wings of birds athwart the rugged ledges of the rock.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. BRANDON.

Mrs. Brandon, a widow lady of mature years, quiet-mannered, composed; with jet black brows, and the darkest of dark eyes that pierced to the soul; with a soft, panther-like step, and a tact that demolished repugnance at the feline properties native and natural—Mrs. Brandon had been nine years in the house, and without a difference of opinion, without a shadow of unpleasantness, between herself and young charge, or even with St. Aubyn himself. That gentleman thought of Mrs. Brandon as of a useful and highly estimable person, genteel, respectable, accomplished; in fact, a treasure, if only for that excellent virtue of never raising her voice above a tranquil, lady-like tone, and at all times retaining her admirable self-possession, worry how pupil might, or go wrong as things sometimes would.

One or two quailed before the hard, keen gaze, when the quiet woman chose to read. Martha Saxe always fidgeted beneath it; even Ashton St. Aubyn at times grew uncomfortable. So very quiet; so very good-mannered; so very deep.

Mrs. Brandon was neatly dressed in black silk, some soft cord without rustle; a cap also of rich, old-fashioned lace, not worn coquettishly, but the black, glossy hair was thin at the parting, and the cap came in for decorum. Narrow tuckers at the throat and wrist, a Whitby brooch, a hair guard, a tiny watch, and a locket containing some dead sorrow. This is the inventory of a person of remarkable character, of slumbering passion held in leash, with a hand of iron incased in velvet.

One day, looking up from his book, moved by the guardian presentiment that shapes our fears, St. Aubyn found the stealthy watch upon him. She was at some mechanical work, finger and thumb and needle plying the restless little routine of their craft; but he had felt the chill of her serpent eyes, and his started from the page, dimly conscious of an unpleasant creeping, as though a reptile were let loose in his vest. Detected, she arose tranquilly and walked to the window near which he was sitting, closing it with that gentleness of action which disarms resentment, and saying, with thoughtful dignity, "I fear you will take cold, these moist winds are treacherous."

Mr. St. Aubyn merely inclined his head and continued his reading, but the look haunted him.

"Where is Lena?" he asked, abruptly.

"Trying to make attar with the old rose leaves," answered the lady, dryly, resuming her work.

"Go and find her, Ponto. Good dog!"

The animal marched gravely off, Mrs. Brandon's lip curling a shade annoyedly.

The dog returned, hem of Miss Lena's dress between his teeth. That lovely truant entered, all flushed with chemistry and best blood of her roses.

"Oh, pa, dear, I've three bottles full; but I hadn't any corks, and I've cut the liqueurs. Don't mind, do you, darling?"

Round his neck went the arms, down into his soul went her loving culprit glances, and he, old magistrate, could but smile forgiveness while playfully shaking his head at the naughtiness.

Mrs. Brandon retired to her own private chamber, lofty, richly furnished as the remainder of that house, and here sank upon an ottoman, a shade of great weariness crossing her face, which for an instant was haggard and wan. She seemed another being under pressure of that care, whatever it might be. With grim irony her teeth met, a smile flickered, then she dallied with the locket appended to her chain; she opened this, and there a long, hard, saturnine face—the face that confounded poor Miss Turner, the Minister's pew-opener.

CHAPTER V.

PICCADILLY.

A BREAKFAST-ROOM, overlooking the Park, shaded by blinds and creepers; coolly elegant, chintz, lace, gilding, a delicately penciled paper, some water-colors in quiet hues with trellis frames, a cream-colored carpet with tiny sprigs of fern, the furniture maple and black, the magnificent mirror also framed in black carving. Unobtrusive taste on all sides.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton, the owner of the house, had partaken of breakfast; he sat by the window, a sheet of the *Times* crumpled in his hand, a small, delicate, thin hand; he had a small, delicate, thin face, a sensitive face, which light hair parted at the centre, falling over the shoulders behind, reminded of Milton in his younger days; the eyes were clear blue, honest-speaking eyes that never lied; the skin fair and pink to the clean-shaven chin; the dark purple dressing-gown open at the throat bared a snowy skin; the fine linen beneath was confined by diamonds. Two little feet, incased in dainty slippers of purple, the work of his mother, were easily rested on an ottoman a servant had wheeled to the window, thoughtfully mindful of his beloved master's comfort. Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not young, but the dazzling lightness, which resembled a halo, conferred artificial youth. He had been waiting longer for the Secretary's attendance than seemed consistent; a shade crossed the mirror.

"Did you not tell Mr. Barnard I was waiting, Simmons?"

"I did, Sir Kinnaird." The faithful fellow hesitated, and was conspicuously troubled.

"What is it, tell me?"

"Mr. Barnard said he would wait upon you when he had breakfasted; and he has just sent to Covent Garden for some mushrooms, concerning the cooking of which he has been lecturing M. Artaud this twenty minutes." And with a look of unspeakable commiseration Simmons placed perfumes, the last novel, a tiny vase of lilies, and a few strawberries upon a malachite table beside his master.

Sir Kinnaird seemed pained, but was too well-bred to betray further annoyance before the man.

Simmons retired backward, closed the door with a gentleness suggestive of a sick-chamber, and hurried to the hall. Sir Kinnaird was hearty as a chamois-hunter, but Simmons imagined the insolence, as he termed it, of that upstart Secretary must exercise a prostrating effect upon his paragon-tempered master, from whose lips he had never heard a harsh word.

When his servant had gone, Sir Kinnaird arose from the indolent attitude, stood at his height, hands clasped behind, and looked forth beyond the flowers, beyond the patrician thoroughfare, over to where the scorched, charred grass formed the arena for a posse of unkempt children. His thoughts were not with these. "How long, how long," he murmured, "is this humiliation to continue? Before my own servants even, insult upon insult, and I have not the power to crush this serpent. Ah, my fair lady mother, bitter, most bitter is the endurance for your good name!"

He lounged to the opposite window; it opened to the garden at the back, where cunning gardeners had made the best of the limited area: in the window a large glass case of fish and water-weed kept the recess cool and shady by its deadened light.

"I shall be so glad to get away from town, and if I can secure this Devonshire estate Barnard tells me is in the market, I can there live quietly and more happily than here or in Paris. I dread meeting the eyes of people I know, lest they notice this galling espionage; I am afraid one of these times I shall do the fellow some mischief. I wonder as it is I can control my old Oxford pluck. Fortunately for the interests of decency and order, his cold, sarcastic eye always freezes me to the backbone, and puts a highly proper quencher on my warmth. Such very bad form, quarreling with one's secretary; horrible!"

With the same *insouciant* grace Sir Kinnaird Dalton lounged back, shrugging his shoulders, resumed his restful position, drew a web-like handkerchief over his delicate waxen face, for there was a fly somewhere buzzing about, and went quietly off to sleep, twitching every now and then with memory of his unpleasant factotum. A shaft of gleaming light stole through joining of the blinds straight to the tossed curls, as partial to alliance with the radiant things. Simmons came softly in, discovered the peaceful state of his master, gently drew the curtain lest the light in travelling should fall athwart the eyelids, smiling affectionately all the time, and receded as softly.

Crossing the hall, he met with Hammond, Sir Kinnaird's valet. This worthy had evidently something to communicate; he signaled to Simmons to accompany him to the housekeeper's room, that lady being absent upon a shopping expedition. Hammond mysteriously closed the door, pulled down his waistcoat, elevated a tuft, and asked, in deeply sympathetic tones,

"How is our poor master, Mr. Simmons?"

"Well, as you ask me, Mr. Hammond, he's very poorly indeed. Dear Sir Kinnaird's quite overcome; gone off, in fact."

"Not fainted?" (aghast). "And yet I'd be surprised at nothing."

"Asleep, Mr. Hammond; but it's the sleep of the suffering."

"I wish Sir Kinnaird 'ud give us a fiver to do the deed. I'd pay for a halter out o' my share, and dig a hole in the back garding; but Mr. Secretary's got others interested in his welfare 'sides us. What d'ye think? Walking out with Maria last evening, I fancied a young chap was a-following. Now there's nothink more ungentlemanlike; and just by Marble Arch I turned sharp, and politely asked, 'What are you sneaking after, young man?'

"'One word with you, my good fellow,' he said, hurriedly.

"'I ain't a good fellow,' I answered, just as hurriedly, for Maria was waiting, and you know how the lower orders crowd at that corner—'leastways not after eight o'clock.'

"'I think you come from Sir Kinnaird Dalton's?'

"'I think I do.'

"'Well, I can put you in the way of earning a ten-pound note with very little trouble to yourself.'

"'Live and learn!' I answered; for I hold the best of us can't know any too much. Then he proceeded to open the little business. He wants a close watch kept on this Secretary, and is prepared to pay handsomely for any reliable bits of information, or whatever else we can hand over."

"'Tisn't the sort of business I'd care to have any thing to do with. Best keep clear, too, of Mr. Noel Barnard."

"But if it assists Sir Kinnaird, Mr. Simmons?" put the wily valet.

"That certainly makes a difference."

"I'm to meet him, a week hence, at the same place."

"It's always been a riddle to me what our master could have been thinking of when he took up with this Mr. Barnard."

"I suspect there's more in that, as in every thing else as goes on up stairs, than gentlemen of our propriety can understand. Ah, Mr. Simmons, it's a hollow world, and if it wasn't really to oblige the family, one like myself couldn't stand it." And so saying, the fine creature drew himself very erect. He had lived with a duke (he called it a juke), and baronets were very small game after that, even when possessed of Adonis curls, and a throat that turned the statuettes paler with envy.

Full of his mission, Hammond walked quietly up the grand staircase until, Mr. Barnard's private chamber reached, he, with considerable effort, lowered his eye until upon a level with the key-hole.

CHAPTER VI.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

PICCADILLY could scarcely contain a more complete contrast than that house afforded in those two men—the listless, elegant Dalton, and his massive, stolid, sardonic Secretary.

Cold, gray eyes, a hard, long face, an inflexible mouth, and teeth that used to meet with an ominous click; livid features, telling of considerable suffering, or study, or hardship, or what not that lines a face; all was hard, cold, cruel, yet withal intellectual. One glance convinced the observer this was no ordinary man, no vulgar, scheming genius of the Bohemian adventurer type, no rude dabbler in intrigue and craft, but a clever, learned diplomatist, as free of grossness as of ignorance, with extraordinary control and suppression; a contour of head whereon caution balanced skill, and a cast of expression which realized the conception of Nero that once set the patrons of the *salon* all agog with wonderment.

Mr. Barnard was writing; but, as moved by a sudden thought, arose and opened the door—the receding back of Mr. Hammond in view.

"Hammond!" The man paused. "One word." And the gentleman returned to his seat at the desk—a curious contrivance, made from his description.

Mr. Hammond entered, and puffed his breast pigeon-fashion, and as suggesting, "Well, after all, you're not my master!"

"Be seated, Hammond; want a word with you."

"Thank ye, Sir; I never sits in the presence of my betters;" and Hammond looked dryly unconscious of the sarcasm. It was noticed by the Secretary, who, however, possessed the useful faculty of never appearing to take or to notice any thing.

"Hammond," pursued the other, in a tone partly didactic, partly solemn, "I shall be sorry to send a bullet through that door—spoils the varnish, makes a devil of a mess—but if you will, you know— However, that is not the point. Going down to housekeeper's room just now, to see what on earth the people are up to with my mushrooms, I overheard your interesting gossip with Simmons. Don't think I was listening, my good fellow—pay somebody a ten-pound note to do that for me—but it was unavoidable. Now I'm not put out about this, Hammond; every dog keeps to his scent; but I blame you very much for not asking more; each pound will improve that hotel you've an eye upon. Now, all in the way of business, may I offer you twenty pounds to give this enterprising stranger the information I've jotted upon this paper, and to follow *him* up, at the distance, you understand, bringing me faithful word without making any one the wiser? A clear thirty pounds, Mr. Hammond, eh?"

This was not said pressingly or as of any consequence beyond being all in the way of business, the speaker coolly docketing memoranda and pigeon-holing notes. He did, certainly, look up once, but it was the look a great banker might bestow upon a small depositor considerably overdrawn.

"I shall be proud to serve you, Mr. Barnard. You put it in the domestic way, and I'm not sure, when one goes in for this work, but the more one does the better for one's self."

"You will yet be an honor to your country, Mr. Hammond" (still methodically arranging his papers). "Now walk down to the culinary department, present my duty to that gourmand Artaud, and say if my breakfast be not served within ten minutes, I shall be under the necessity of advising his earliest discharge. You understand me? Ah! close the door softly, please. Thanks!"

The man went forth in a daze. Mr. Barnard looked through the morning letters. Punctual to time his repast was served. A light eater, although an epicure, he quickly left the table, changed dressing-gown for morning coat, and entered the pretty breakfast-room, where Sir Kinnaird Dalton still slept over his morning supplement.

Mr. Barnard stood before the idle exquisite with a curious expression, and marked the small red mouth parting for a word. It fell—

"Serpent!"

The Secretary pushed a gilded footstool deftly with his foot, and awakened the sleeper without apparent effort of his own.

"Bless my soul! I've been to sleep. Would you remove that fly from the cream? That's the worst of a fellow going to sleep; something sure to go wrong. Glad you have come; want to talk about that place you were telling me of. Private sale, I think?"

"Private."

"Torquay, if my memory serves me aright?"

"Torquay; pleasant property; Eagle Hall; do you know it?"

"What, Lionel Travers's place?"

"The same."

"Never so astonished in my life. What is the cause? We were at Oxford together. I take an interest in poor old Lionel—cleverest, nicest fellow of the University."

"Little gay, wasn't he? Fond of cards?"

"Not in the least; quietest fellow out; went into the Church. Stay! He didn't go into the Church, through that marriage with Beresford Travers's niece."

"Ward, you mean."

"Beg pardon, I never can get over relationships; it *was* his ward. Awfully pretty, I remember; used to see her in the Park, perched up by the side of old Travers, proud as a turkey-cock. Rather good, that tutor of Lionel's falling in love with the girl—got kicked out, I fancy—heard something of the sort."

"Unpleasant, if the person happened to be a gentleman." Said with such caustic dryness, Sir Kinnaird shivered ever so slightly.

"Well, that girl was a sacred trust, and Beresford fully intended, I believe, to marry her himself. It's certain he loved her with more than a guardian's love; and no wonder, seeing she had grown up under his careful nurture, and had no equal for either grace or beauty. Ah! Lionel and Ella were well matched." And exhausted by so long a speech thus early in the morning, Sir Kinnaird sank back with, "Kindly pass me that cushion; perhaps you'd place it at my back?"

A pause, Mr. Barnard looking from the window. Sir Kinnaird presently remembers—

"But you were going to tell me how this occurred—the Eagle Hall estate. What does Lionel want to sell for?"

"Your friend, Mr. Lionel Travers, is dead; suicide, it is thought. You are probably aware he was ruined — went for a hundred thousand."

"What a blow for Beresford! Although he never spoke to or saw his son after that affair about Ella, he loved him beyond forgetfulness. A crotchety, proud old fellow, he would keep to his word whatever it cost him. He swore he'd never see him again in this world, and he never did. I am sorry for the lovely widow and their child—they had a child. Whatever will become of them both?"

"Starved!" The doom was pronounced with hideous vindictiveness.

"Amiable as ever, Mr. Barnard!" And with intense disgust, Sir Kinnaird, plucking a camellia to pieces, blew the petals one by one from the window.

"I have particular cause to be amiable in this instance. I don't often undertake to enlighten your pin-head, dear Sir Kinnaird; permit me to deviate from a custom of reserve habitual and characteristic. The tutor you did me the honor to remember a few minutes since happened to be your devoted servant. Mr. Lionel himself administered that undignified remonstrance, upon the appeal of the lady, who declared herself to have been insulted. He would listen to no explanation, and that fine old English gentleman, his father, had the dogs unloosed on that retreat of ignominy. I had time to forewarn the Squire of the loss I knew inevitable; to prophesy to Lionel ruin, disgrace. Well, Sir Kinnaird, my words have come true. It was *I* who brought about the trouble you commiserate so deeply. This is the last night his wife and child will remain in their stately mansion, where at this moment they have a mattress and a broken pitcher, and two or three empty tea-cups; for every thing, even to the child's wearing apparel, was seized by the one creditor—myself! I bought up the debts; the estate didn't cover; it was of no consequence, and Widow Travers turns out to-morrow. That is all, Sir Kinnaird, except that *you* purchase the estate of its present owner, and enter into possession forthwith. Your check-book."

It had all been said without raising of the voice above the cold, cruel, Jeffreys tone. The book was handed with the curtness of a merchant's clerk.

"If I purchase the estate, Mr. Barnard, it will not be at your bidding, but with the view of proving a friend to the wife and child of the man I loved even as a brother."

Mr. Barnard smiled grimly at that, but contented himself with opening the book at the current leaf, placing a tiny piece of glass and silver elegance between the perfume, lilies, and strawberries, and a dainty ivory pen in attendance. Sir Kinnaird was very fastidious, with all his good sense; his innumerable properties must be the pink of perfection; an ordinary wooden holder would have dismayed him; therefore the Secretary even walked the extreme length of the velvet pile to procure that slender piece of work for the wealthy baronet.

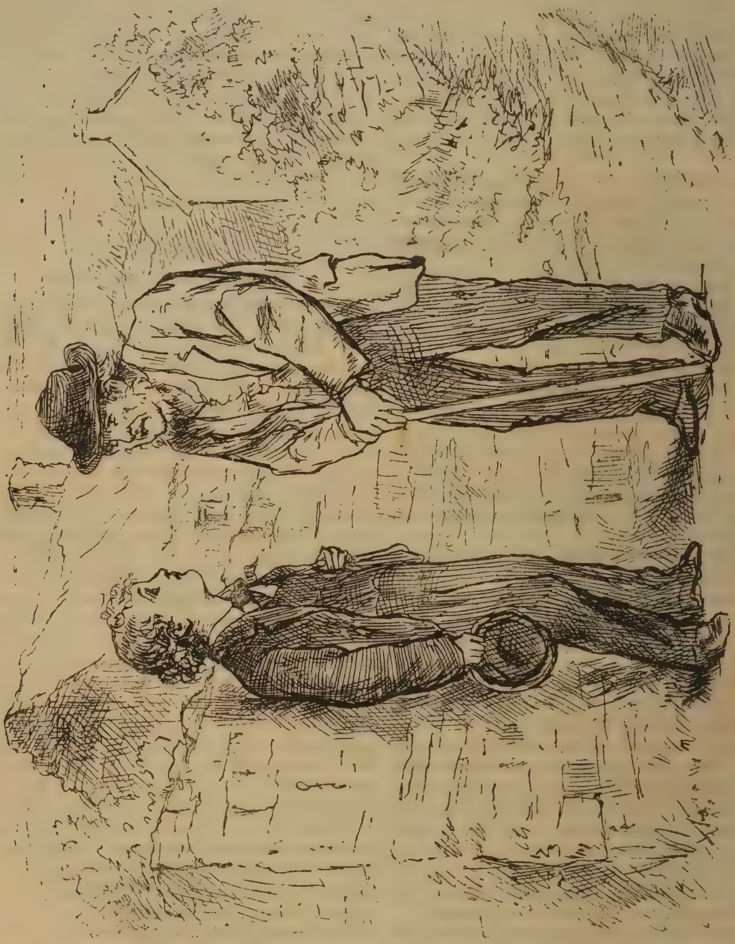
CHAPTER VII.

SEABOROUGH IN THE SEASON.

A BRIGHT little town, with a white face ever smiling, when the setting sun fell athwart its trim terraces especially, as it was doing at the time the evening train arrived from London. Rather a crowded train, for Seaborough was visited by many during the season, laying claim to being a popular place; and those who did come came in a legion. The first-class carriages were not overfull, perhaps, but the second and third were freely patronized. Bustling about with violence, and that constituent the unkind call fussiness, a lady of very prepossessing appearance was worrying every porter she saw concerning a black bonnet-box which had not turned up, and which, she declared, should be found if the engine coal-hole was emptied! With her, little Rose, all uneasy and flushed by her mother's eccentricities, and looking prettily embarrassed with every one gazing so admiringly at her. Mrs. Blake came here because unknown, because no tip-top people ever came; and, being a lady of infinite style, she could walk here with queenly dignity, as the Duchess of So-and-So did the King's Road, Brighton, much to the envy of this good lady. Apartments in the Crescent had been retained by letter; they had been to the same house for years; and as soon as that bonnet-box came to light, the twenty-seven packages piled on the fly would move on to that commodious haven. The season had commenced, this was the pioneer rush, and every body looked anticipatory. Big waves and duckings, sea-weed collecting and shell-finding, sands, minstrelsy, and delights of all sorts, were reflected in the sparkling, eager eyes. These did not wait upon the platform, while Mrs. Blake was poking at the engine's internals with her umbrella, Rose imploring, porters explaining, the station-master remonstrating, but they jogged sturdily down the hill that led to the beach.

The crowd had scattered. Last of them all was seen a pale-faced, slender youth, who with difficulty dragged himself along—delicate certainly, and no doubt suffering; a wan, colorless face, all pinched and haggard, but still fair to look upon; flashing eyes, with quick, restless movement, as ever on the alert for ill; a convulsive clutching with the wasted hands, and that slow, toiling progress so indicative of weariness.

The red glare on squares and rounds of glass, on the slope of conservatories, on the gilded vane of the new church, on the flint of the tower of the old, on the slant blue slates, on the white façade of the Athenæum and Assembly-rooms, on the bronze dolphin central of the genteel square—upon all the face of the nestling little town between hills, the red glare of the sunset. And it seemed a mocking sort of light, after all, to our traveller, who leaned resting against a wall at the corner where roads divided, one leading downward the route to the new town—the genteel residences, the clean, bright lines of shops, the parade, the pier, the esplanade, the sands, and the Congregational church; while the road that stretched away up the higher ground conducted to the old town—the colony of quaint, red-bricked, gabled dwellings that were good enough for the fathers; the rows of odd little shops, the old well, the blacksmith's forge, and the wheelwright's; Dr. Poppinton's school, a dreary, large, ivy-covered building of historical date; and the venerable church, with its massive tower, standing like a bulwark of the faith, serenely unconscious of its symmetrical rival below-town. The youth rested hesitating, and watching the gradually lessening glow upon the picture. An old man coming along was moved to address the stranger, he looked so forlorn and poorly.



“AN OLD MAN COMING ALONG WAS MOVED TO ADDRESS THE STRANGER.”

“Bee'st unwell, laddy?” wiping his forehead, looking kindly and father-like on the youth.

“I have been very ill, my friend. I am better now, thank God! London's a sorry place for the sick and poor.”

“Ay, truly is it. My poor lad went yonder—thought he'd do; worked hard at his trade, too, he did; but he fell faint one summer, wasn't up to the mark at his time of a mornin', took to his bed later, but wouldn't let the woman know my address—didn't want to disturb me. So he died, and I all the time waiting through the summer and the autumn for his letter. All the flowers on his favorite trees blossomed and fell, and it never came; and in snow-time I had saved enough for the journey, and went to the woman where he'd lodged, and she just told me on the door-step—

never so much as asking me on the mat—how my boy had fallen low and got in arrears, and grown worser and worser, too low to eat, and how she'd ended matters by turning him out to die in somebody else's room. I could learn no more, but I could guess the rest. Yes, it's a sorry place, laddy. I'm glad for your father's heart you're out of it."

"I have no father nor mother, old friend. It is as well, perhaps, as I should be slight comfort."

The old man shook his head.

"I do assure ye I often feel as if, had I the very worst lad as was ever given up, I could rest content; but to be growing old with never a bit of kith nor kin to meet yer eyes sometimes, it's that's so hard. I seem to want it more now I'm feebler like."

"I am quite as lonely; I am—friendless. You at least have neighbors whose kindly greeting meets your own, in whose eyes you daily see a little interest. I am without even that."

It was said so desolately, the old man's features softened and his voice trembled.

"Come, come, and so young; you should be all hope. What hast come here for, if it be not too bold a question?"

"I have heard there is some one staying here whom I would see unseen. Helped by his hand already, that hand would raise me if I came in its way. Yes, I must see him once again."

"Ay, laddy, thou'rt so gentle, it seems none could help being a friend to thee."

"Could I afford the time to tell my story, father, 'twould wring as many tears from you as I should shed. You've not lived to this honored age but to find the strange, tragic tale in many a life truly told. I want cheap lodgings while here; can you advise me where to seek them? I was pausing, as usual, between two roads."

"This one leads to Old Town, where rooms are cheaper than below; but half a mile on is Sleperton village, and if ye could do with cottage comfort, it's cheaper still."

"Thanks, many thanks; that would suit me quite as well; my means are small, unfortunately."

"Ay, we ain't all blessed alike in the pocket! See some o' the grand folk down there a-walking, showing o' their feathers? You can go an' see 'em now, band's a-playing; I could tell 'em same Lord made us all. Oh, it's a grand place is Seaborough New Town, but give me the old place up among the trees where the good folks lie buried, and none o' them black-faced singers with banjoes comes a-disturbing of their rest. Maybe you'll feel interested in Sleperton: dost care for mysteries and such like baubles?"

The youth smiled, the question was so quaint.

"Not much; why?"

"The great house on the Green will interest you; full in your view, there are cottages all round the Green; a sight o' people goes from Seaborough New Town to see the old Hall."

"But what is it—a ruin?"

"Oh no, not yet, but soon will be, I trow. It has a story to it; not that there's any truth in it, I dare say, but we poor old country folk must have our bit o' gossip." And smiling kindly, the old man made for continuing his way, and Walter Gordon was again alone. The little chat had refreshed his spirits. All seemed so quiet and peaceful after the London turmoil, so sweet and fresh after the murky heat of the City, he already felt revived. Sleperton presently; meantime he would reconnoitre.

Taking the downward road, passing in succession a public-house, a line of pretty dwellings, and a farm-yard, a shed whereon were pasted announcements of a flower show, a lecture, and a theatrical entertainment, sales of stock and plant, and a selling off of drapery, then coming to a stretch of market-garden, where the herbs and flowers sent forth an evening incense so grateful, the youth paused, leaned upon the fence, and enjoyed the cool, fresh fragrance. The glow had died to a gray, and the town was putting on its quiet evening shade. More people; the shops had closed, and they of commerce had strolled out after work, man and maid, taking the country way; they stared hard at Walter till he blushed again. It was the custom to stare at strangers in this quiet town, and a stranger of appearance like to this was not seen every evening. Past the church, still down hill, then three or four detached buildings of a better sort. One of them was entitled Sea-view Villa, although to catch the sea view you would have to climb the chimney. Then past the sexton's, "APARTMENTS" in one window, and "PARTIES DECENTLY INTERRED" in the other; a small store for general ware; a private house, set back in a ghastly garden where shingle seemed at bowls with oyster shells, and marigolds had spread like the measles; a low-pitched place with stables in the rear; innumerable dogs at amateur coursing to the rout of quiet-minded fowls enjoying the strut before roost; "VETERINARY SURGEON" was on the gate, and an ancient and tan-like smell redolent every where. Next came a baker's; in the window a rakish-looking roll, a half-quartern or two, some bags of flour on drill, three bottles of sweets, dead flies, a black beetle, suspicious-looking cakes with red things stuck therein, tartlets of apparently primeval origin, stale biscuits, and other confectionery; and then—a young ladies' seminary, with "SEABOROUGH ACADEMY" in large letters on a brass plate—this was the school that discomposed Dr. Poppinton's young gentlemen; and next to this a corn, hay, seed, and coal merchant's office. Here commenced the roadways proper of the town; that is to say, the water-carts went not beyond this point—those water-carts were a baptismal nuisance in Seaborough. The light was growing more sober, gas twinkled in dusky drawing-rooms, shrubs in the gardens became shadowy of color, hotel halls were lighted up, the line of windows of the Athenæum were all a-gleam, and patrons hurried up the steps. He had come to a region of well-paved streets, broad thoroughfares, the best shops, the square, the wide opening to the marine front. Right and left the fine houses of residents and visitors, two considerable hotels, boarding-houses, and those displaying the magic word "APARTMENTS" in the slips of garden. Before it all a well-kept walk of sea sand and shell, turf with seats, shrubs, and a few flower beds; and upon this agreeable promenade, in the centre of which the town subscription band played, the company walked up and down, chattering one to another, quizzing style and criticising appearance, or lounged on the seats, listening to the music and watching the stars peep forth above the sea.

As Mrs. Blake's dress swept the greensward, train some inches longer than any body else's, with her little girl Rose as a foil, but more beautiful than all the promenade put together, every one looked over shoulder at the new-comer, wondering what distinguished personage it could be; some few followed on trail—easy of accomplishing without offense—and Hannington's robe excited a just proportion of envy. The Visitor's List would be out on the morrow, and curiosity might be satisfied, unless, unfortunately, it was some grand duchess preserving strict *incognita.* Or it might even be one of royal lineage—it had been rumored that the Prince of Wales would send his children to Seaborough for a quiet month. That lovely girl—they saw the features of the Queen in the little gold-encircled face. Perfectly aware of the commotion she was causing, having come on purpose, Mrs. Blake walked, with imperial carriage, head erect, Seaborough at foot. Why not? Joseph had money. Only the night before they had talked of retiring, and Mrs. Blake, poking a sharp nose out of the night-cap, mentioned cream-colored ponies and bells without good-tempered Joseph kicking.

No one was more annoyed than Mrs. Major Howard, who, by this distinguished advent, was dethroned. For a long time the military lady had held sovereign sway at Seaborough. She did keep a pony-chaise and tiger, she had the real original court presence, and when a girl she had received lessons in deportment. Papa was in a very good position, and mamma had angled for a knight at that time. The Major possessed a pretty house just off the Marine Parade. No one was quite certain about his income, or about the probability of the little bills being paid; but as the Major referred every body to the Duke of Cambridge, and as nobody in Seaborough quite knew how to approach that great person, the Major's dignity and social importance were taken for granted, and very great court was paid to them. Mrs. Howard considered herself a lady of the first water, and her head tossed at the Blake *entrée* with ominous significance, as much as to say, "Some tradesman's wife, I'll be bound!" Mrs. Major Howard did not believe so—the stranger was too *en règle* for that—but the words fitted. Major Howard walked beside his lady, composed and dignified, twirling a cane, as accustomed to give command, and as quite at ease in court or camp. Mrs. Howard's "Just look at the woman, Major!" provoked no descent from that broad frontage and Cæsar-like mien; a twinkle of pleasantry across to his friend Sir Charles Neville, who walked by the side of the Major's lady—that was all. But Sir Charles, who admired Mrs. Howard with a naughty Dumas order of admiration, looked reproachful, and gave it as his firm opinion there was nothing in the woman, and whatever the folks were staring at he couldn't imagine—a verdict that raised the handsome young fop for the first time in the estimation of careful Mrs. Howard.

Quite removed from these, observant alike of the Major's party and of the fresh arrivals, was a lady of singular elegance, yet dressed with quiet good taste. She walked the lawn, in company with her son, without attracting any particular measure of attention: there was that upon her face, however, the thoughtful would have gazed twice and thrice upon without understanding, so strange an expression it was at times. This was Mrs. Vincent, of whom more anon. She resided at The Cottage, Sleperton, near by the mysterious old Manor-house, called by Walter Gordon's informant the Hall. Sleperton Manor, he rightly said, had a story of its own, a weird, ghastly sort of story—no ancient legend surrounded by an atmosphere of blue fire, but a chronicle of the day; and rumor said Mrs. Vincent was somehow mixed up with it. Anyway, she alone had the run of the deserted place, excepting always the steward, Reuben Smith, of the Manor Farm, who kept the keys. These two, Mrs. Vincent and Reuben Smith, were the worst of friends. When, soon after the Lord of the Manor disappeared from among men—gone to foreign parts, it was said—Reuben locked alike doors and gates, and evidently meant the place to keep so, he was one evening surprised to see their very quiet and lady-like neighbor emerge. An altercation ensued, which she closed abruptly by producing duplicate keys of the various entrances, and a Paris-dated letter from the owner, Lord Lindon, giving herself and son permission, whenever agreeable, to visit the Manor-house, use the library, and any other of his possessions, at pleasure. This settled it, but at the same time shrouded it—the mystery had thickened.

On this evening walk, among other of the company studied by that quiet observer, Mrs. Vincent, young Mr. Gordon came in for his share of contemplation and speculation. The pale, wasted, delicate face, with its outline of melancholy beauty, was yet so full of intelligence and refinement, it became the haunting memory of all others. He sat far beyond track of the fashionables, hidden by shrubs, apparently reading—a book was open, his face was down.

While the events narrated were passing at one part, nearer the band were assembled the people who belong to the order that go right up to the wall at the Academy—*butt* at the pictures, as it were—and stare at conceptions four inches ahead on the magnifying principle. Similarly they must listen to the music, have one ear inside the trombone or none of it.

Here were Harry Abbott, and Harry Abbott's wife, and Harry Abbott's girl, as pleasant a group as you well might see. Harry was stout and rosy-faced, farmer-like, kindly, humorsome, hospitable; it was all in that florid, good-natured face: the shake of the hand was cordial, and conveyed a feeling of sincerity; the tone of the voice brimmed with laughter, honest, contented, and Saxon.

Harry Abbott's wife (she was always spoken of in that familiar fashion, never as Mrs. Harry Abbott) was a veritable fac-simile of Harry Abbott's self—homely, kind, frank, and genuine. Their daughter had just left boarding-school, was a merry, boisterous, awkward lass, with sheep's-eyes on Lorry Vincent, who was impervious as a prince.

And here was Dr. Hunter, the leading practitioner of Seaborough, who walked the turf now and then to see who was ailing; a tall, pale man, given to poking one in the ribs and looking from habit at the lips, as though every tongue would hang forth at the mute interrogation. The doctor had a grudge against Seaborough—it was over-healthy, people didn't ail as they ought, seeing they were born into this ailing world. Dr. Hunter was skillful, the sphere was a contracted one, the parish professional did the lower orders, and was immensely popular; still, Dr. Hunter took all quietly, looked reproachfully at the robust, the well-shaped, the vigorous, and with equable assurance stood on his dignity. If people were vulgar and gross, and not sufficiently well-bred to wear delicately, they must be pitied; it was certain they could not be helped.

It is strange people never tire of walking up and down the spasmodic little reaches allotted them, never tire of the perpetual gossip about each other. The routine at this retired watering-place was similar to that of its rivals, except that, being of lesser degree, faces were known quicker and remarks the sooner exhausted; it became difficult indeed to discover or invent notelets of interest upon dress or appearance, and the only bones left for picking were the antecedents. Seaborough had picked at Mrs. Vincent until that charming lady was bare as a bleached skeleton, yet was Seaborough as mystified as at the beginning; it could not disentangle that past history, the pre-widowhood. Had any body known the lamented Mr. Vincent? Not one of them. Elegant as were the appointments of The Cottage, had any body ever seen a portrait at all to be construed into that of Lorry's papa? Nobody. The lady lent books sometimes: could recollection serve for a bold masculine hand, a bold masculine name? Only Lorry's school-boy hangers. Had a male umbrella been observed in the stand? No; only the slight-built protection from the sun, black and gray and steel and shot, which Mrs. Vincent called her sun-shade. They were still busy at the bones—difficult to get at as those in the show caverns, but interspersed with occasional snatches at Mrs. Major Howard and others. Upon this evening, however, all Seaborough was to be paralyzed: a stranger was seen walking with Mrs. Vincent, and the most remarkable-looking stranger ever seen within the municipal bounds, talking earnestly, as was evident; no mere acquaintance-gossip; and Seaborough kept an Argus eye upon the stranger. He might be the Emperor of somewhere, or he might be the nobody who is always to hand, but he was not by any means a fascinating person outwardly, and Seaborough was excited: agitation that arrived at a climax when he was seen shaking hands with Sir Charles Neville, was heard introduced to Mrs. Major Howard and the Major, as—

"My friend, Mr. Noel Barnard!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TANGLED DIPLOMACY THICKENS.

Beresford Travers, Esq., and Mr. Herbert Garston.

An elderly handsome man, portly, with remarkably fine head, pleasant features, an open, generous expression, white hair arranged with considerable care, through which he often passes a very white, somewhat large, hand, whereon an enormous diamond set in slender gold seems to have an easy time of it. Attire faultless, so black as to dazzle; a white cravat, spotless wristbands, and black-studded front, over which luxuriantly descended the silver beard to the vest. This was the only living representative of the houses of Beresford and Travers, the first the most ancient of patrician families, the latter of more modern origin but of great wealth.

Hardly less prepossessing in appearance, but altogether cultivating a *négligé* style that was an agreeable blending of the artist-tourist and the gentleman-sportsman, Herbert Garston, friend and *protégé* of this gentleman of the old school, was a study upon which the eye might well delight to rest—frank and candid, and possessed of a rough-and-ready manly dignity that invited confidence and assured of honor.

These are talking upon important business at the moment we intrude, and exigencies of our story demand our listening for a time. Scene: an old-fashioned drawing-room in the St. James's Street residence of Mr. Travers.

"But is your information reliable, my dear Garston?"

"Quite, Sir. The man is a second Nero. I believe there is scarcely any length to which he would not go in furtherance of his revenge, his malice, and his ambition. I have no moral doubt that, indirectly, he encompassed your son with difficulty, and brought about the sad catastrophe."

Mr. Travers passed his hand over the eyes that for an instant became clouded.

"I had no conception such a character existed outside a romance, or off the melodramatic stage."

"Ah! he's not of that order. Why, this fellow banks at the London and Westminster, and is equable as a general! I verily believe he looks upon the world as one vast strategy ground. He's so infernally like a jack-in-the-box—excuse warmth—he seems starting up in all parts of the island at once, he quite undoes all preconceived and orthodox notions of the villain proper. I'm no sooner on his trail in one county than he appears in another with the rapidity of the devil on two sticks. I shall soon begin to think he keeps a reserve of steam-engines and packets."

Mr. Travers smiled at the bluntness of his attached friend, whom he had known from boyhood, and ever the same faithful, impetuous, stubborn, hot-headed piece of honesty. Herbert Garston had sworn to unearth this fox, in the interests of his poor dead comrade in Art and Letters, upon whose honored name a stigma rested; in the interests of his beloved benefactor, the patron and encourager of his every endeavor. *Not* in a dependent point of view; to set which delicate matter right once for all it may be disclosed that Herbert Garston was the only son of a wealthy widow.

"We never noticed any thing particularly vicious about the man; a little sombre, perhaps, sometimes; and I think poor Lionel did once make the remark that occasionally, when reading with him, he wore a gloomy expression, such as he fancied Aram might have worn. Apart from this he was always reserved, quiet, thoughtful, and gentlemanly."

"Yes, that is precisely his aggravating point; he has the manners of a Roman emperor united to the business talent of a City merchant, the cleverness of a barrister, the subtle cunning of the worst old fox overrunning your estate. But I think I've got him—yes, I think I've got him."

Mr. Garston's hazel eyes twinkled and blinked with the gratification of a man who has something to communicate he has been keeping in reserve. The big diamond flashed with sympathy, and Mr. Travers drew his chair closer, waiting without speaking, and with eager, restless expression, as dreading something unpleasant. Mr. Travers objected to any thing unpleasant upon principle; any thing that disarranged the reposeful grace of his years and position.

"I have added one of Sir Kinnaird Dalton's men to my staff of auxiliaries."

"A good stroke that." Garston nodded complacently.

"I don't like the business, but it's no use employing clean tools for dirty work. If this man could be touched by the law, we would let it take him off our hands; but he is so deucedly clever no law can touch him. Prove him on the very square inches of a crime, he would prove himself to have been two hundred miles removed at the time, and that is a feat in tactics we can't get over."

"I trust poor Ella is placed above the effects of his machinations, and that she has well considered the proposals of my letter."

"To provide for her child—"

"Removed altogether from her care, and placed absolutely and entirely under my own. I would derive happiness from this proposition, of which its mother deprived me."

Very quiveringly the old gentleman thus alluded to the blow that had shattered the idealism of his home.

"You also make provision for—for Mrs. Travers. Am I correct, Sir?"

"Quite, my dear boy. I have suggested—only suggested, for she is delicately sensitive, poor thing!—that I should regard it quite in the light of a sacred duty, and not as placing her under any obligation, if she would allow me to supply her with two hundred pounds per annum, merely for immediate calls, of which there are so many in life."

"And you still keep to your determination not to see her?"

"Nothing can ever alter that."

"It is the only thing I can not reconcile with your nobility, your goodness. Forgive me."

"Well as you know me, Herbert, you can have little sympathy with myself in that trouble; you can not realize the whole experience. But this is not for discussion. I don't know how we wandered on the theme. You were speaking of—"

"Yet a word—tell you why in an instant—would you have the little girl at the Park?"

"No; I've arranged with the Percivals. You know them. Highly respectable and superior people; they rent my largest farm; have a son in town—writes, I believe. Mrs. Percival will act like a mother with the little one, whom I shall see at intervals. Why did you ask? No consequence, you know; only thought you might have a motive."

"And so I have. Noel Barnard has been seen in the neighborhood again."

The diamond flashed ominously. Mr. Travers arose, walked impatiently to the window, looked out on the dull street—"More wet, I think," and returned to the recesses of fragrant leather.

"I was going to say that was bad news; but I don't really know that it need trouble us in the least."

"I've got so in the habit of looking for mischief following any visit Mr. Barnard favors one with, that I look on trouble as a natural consequence."

"Did you intend to suggest at the outset that you had ascertained any thing of his antecedents?"

"I did. He has been *married*. At that time he was in India—"

"India?"

"He seems to have been half over the globe. I find his trail in both hemispheres. And he had one child—a girl—although what became of her I have been unable to trace."

"Well, this is certainly fresh. I confess you have surprised me."

"Next time I call, I hope to have more to tell you. If my Piccadilly informant be faithful, I ought to make progress."

Mr. Travers arose, as indicating the interview was at an end.

"You will lunch with me; carriage at three for the Row?"

"Thank you very much. I promised to be in Harley Street, to play companion to my mother, who is at present without that necessary adjunct to her household."

"Good! Never fail in attendance upon your mother; there can be no worthier. Please tender my best respects. Look in any evening agreeable for our quiet duel at chess. So glad yours is not a club taste, which wars with the domestic."

After his young friend's departure (we call Mr. Garston young comparatively; in years he was about thirty), the gentleman indulged a brief soliloquy:

"The dear fellow is plunging heart and soul into this unthankful work. It was no ordinary friendship between the boys, and—and—although neither word nor hint ever warranted the assumption, I believe Herbert liked poor Ella, but for honor checked the sentiment. If so, this energetic quest may not be as disinterested as appears. Verily I may not flatter my foolish years by supposing a manly young fellow is going to dance on service for my advantage, with never thought of reward other than the friendship, nay, love, of an old man who would have been proud of a son like this. Not to injure my lad by the thought. Alas! he is removed now from any injury coldness can inflict."

And what a beautiful smile, paternal and benevolent, was upon the Squire's face as he saw a happy time ahead, when his fairy-like grandchild would flit through the fields and woods, bringing garlands to enwreath his horse's neck! Her feet should patter over the old polished boards where her mother's were wont to beat music, and all the associations of the elder Ella, that to this day were bleeding wounds, would be healed by this newer charm, that must combine the lovely graces of the two he had most loved, his son and ward; this, *this* should bring back smiles, and laughter, and sunshine, and glad music to the great drawing-rooms at Beresford Court; this should renew his interest in life, revive old love, replant sweet dreams that blossomed once—the purest, loveliest under heaven. And he closed his eyes, and wove of shreds of memories, lingering charms of his boy and his girl, a creation small and delicately fair, with graces many as the fawn's, and a young heart full of love that must centre about himself. But he would be cautious, not see too much of her, not allow himself to become too fond of her. He had done so once, and had learned the sharp lesson of idol-worship, and would never do so again—never again.

Later, in the Park, he met Mr. Noel Barnard superbly mounted. That personage raised his hat with the air of a prince, and his most fascinating smile. The old gentleman coldly acknowledged the salutation—he had too fine breeding to ignore it altogether.

The Duke of Huntingtowers had his team in the Park that afternoon, and pulled up for a word with Mr. Beresford Travers; their estates in Hertfordshire joined, and both had property about St. Alban's. This had produced a neighborliness.

"By-the-bye"—after the greetings and usual three-minutes' gossip—"Cousin Dalton has bought that place of your poor son's in Devonshire. Was told of it but ten minutes ago."

Mr. Travers stooped, even to the girth, which he tested with his hand, and then raising his head, with quiet and pleasant but slightly flushed face, he remarked,

"This is quick work, my lord; I was unaware of it."

"It's an awfully go-ahead age. Ta! ta! I've rather a bolter here."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME.

In the twilight's soft and solemn hour, by the open window, looking upon the pleasure-wilderness of flowers and trees, and the far, rich tract, hill-girt, sea-bordered. Too soon the familiar landmarks were becoming shadowy and dim—less color, less form, with the tranquil outspreading of the mists, the silent march of the factions of the kingdom of gloom.

A star here and there, lights twinkling upon the hills, an after-glow upon the waves that dallied with the kiss until dead on the imperial bosom.

A cold wind astir, rattling dry twigs against the window-pane, like invisible ones tapping for admission, and rustling of dry and withered leaves about the garden, bringing thoughts of that familiar hymn telling of decay.

The woman by the window shivered, chilled to the heart, tears coursing the pale cheeks, sobs shaking the slight form, moans broken upon the lips not long since wreathed about with smiles.

With arms clasped round her child, kneeling beside her trying to comfort; cold and as desolate.

Sad gray seemed tinting all the well-loved scene; they had never noticed it as on this evening. Sea, sky, earth, growing more dim and hueless every instant. They would have had that gold and roseate last a little longer—with it departed the warmth of heart, the smile upon the face of their fair town.

They had no kind neighborly one to breathe a word of solace, people had long forgotten the existence of such very unfortunate folks, and she had no reward whereby to retain the sympathy of professional comforters; therefore had she been alone in her grief, forsaken in her trouble, utterly deserted.

Stay! That child! Words—frail, wingèd things, ineloquent—can not tell the comfort of her child. That small presence, so wonderfully made, slight and slender, of small account by laws that govern physics, yet had helped to fill the aching void of that dreaded loss—the hardest trouble a sensitive gentlewoman can ever know—the loss of home. She had been hugging this to her heart and soul, and thinking she could bear it so this were left; and now the ordeal was approaching, and stern necessity, unsatisfied, claimed the darling also.

It was a blank, horrible alternative. She had besieged Heaven for strength to do the thing required of her, to put her sweet one far from her, and struggle and fight alone, nor man, nor woman, nor child, to help on by the tenderness of company.

How beautiful was every object upon which the eye rested! But twelve years' endearing association, yet her very life seemed linked to these treasures the stately lady-mother of her husband had held as dear, and all to pass to the unfeeling hand of the stranger, who would alter and destroy until the place that knew her would know her no more. For romantic ideas of working, working, working, until Lionel's name and fame were cleared, of purchasing again his cherished home, of passing here the remainder of her days—these Utopian dreams had flitted; but iron sense had brought iconoclasm to mind, and she experienced the hard truth that the sacred precincts, profaned by the stranger, were never the same again.

She reasoned with herself, poor little soul, and calculated in this manner: supposing she obtained a situation, and put by the two hundred pounds mentioned in her death-warrant—for so it seemed to her—still, it would take years to pay off her poor husband's bills (set down within some hundred thousand pounds), let alone repurchase of the home.

And if she refused to give up her child, she would be poorer than the vagrants, more ill-fated than the houseless, and mother and child worn and worse for suffering and denials. They had been accustomed to every luxury under the sun (he was no niggard, dead Lionel), and they could not take to dry, hard fare upon the instant; the course of deprivation had so weakened and subdued, even suffering lost half the sting of its poison fang, so benumbed were the faculties by natural pain. To see the child grow weaker day by day would be maddening, would be criminal, with such an offer open as had been submitted by the friend and guardian for whom she experienced the same reverent gratitude and love as had animated her heart when first living under his care. The love that guardian had no longer concealed after the blow had fallen—but which punctilious and too nice a sense of honor had constrained him to disguise so long—had been as great surprise to her as Lionel. Neither had suspected it, or perhaps their reverent affection would have made them root out that which would then have seemed a guilty, selfish passion.

Despite her sorrows she was passing fair, and these two seemed sisters rather than mother and daughter. As for the child—an apple blossom, a bouquet of snow-flakes, spray of the sea—to what not that is exquisite shall she be likened?

The deep auburn of the mother's luxuriant hair, unconfined, strayed lovingly with the clear gold of the child's, lustrous even by that light.

The fields and orchards, gardens and groves, sent forth the fragrance of night sweeter than it had ever seemed, more odorous than perfumes by dim altars in Eastern churches.

It was a weirdly sweet time: sad, bitter, filled with dead pain, the gloaming stealing something every minute; yet even as it faded, the evening star, growing brighter, fascinated like the jewel-eye of the fable.

Terraces, statues, fountains, paled and grew gray, then draped with shadow, until they seemed all hung about with mourning. And surely some one was hanging those trees with a pall—and it was not so long since mother and child had swung laughingly there to music, and rose-showers thrown by a man's strong hand.

That chain of mournful memories, regrets, laments, dread recollections, would obtrude and overrun even her later griefs. And the clasp of the little warm hand, the hasty, anguished glimpses of those eyes where tears were bravely checked, the voice that was strung to tune comfort, but seeming to falter with pain, it was the lone, waste, unutterably tried hour, the agony of a double parting; and words can not describe the horror of the desolation in view.

"Mamma, dear, do not tremble so; let me close the window. Why, you are still crying! Pray do not cry; all will come right. See, there's the star of Hope; we shall yet be happy, we shall be *together*, and God will watch over us. I don't mind any thing while I have you, mamma. Let me kiss the tears away. Nay, I will sit upon your knee, and nestle my head here as I used; why not, dear mother? If we are poor, we but cling the closer; it will bring us nearer, this ugly poverty you dread so. Oh! don't do that; so many who are poor are loving, they've nothing else to live for. Smile on me, mother dear; it is so long since a smile was like light on your beautiful face. I don't care a bit, if you will only try to stop crying; you are sobbing *so* dreadfully. See, I draw your lips down to mine, and will keep them here until you leave off crying. Why, we're through the worst, and I—little I—saw them take my doll's house and the pretty dressed things, and my puzzles and books, all that you and papa gave to me, and I never shed a tear! The man with the big dirty hands said he had a lass they'd do for, and I have had many a pleasant time with them, and wouldn't be so selfish as to say him nay, poor man. And our gilt and white chairs, why, mamma, we never used to sit in them. The piano I couldn't bear to play, and your Berlin and silk work isn't half so nice and useful as good strong calico. If our beds are gone, we shall find some one who will lend us another, and now, you know, dear, we shall always sleep together; if the bed's hard, the more healthy; poor papa often said so. And don't you remember when at the University he always slept on the mattress in preference? It will be a new life to us, but I shall like it. I always did wish for a gypsy life, didn't I, dear? A little cart and a cottage, some chickens and a shaggy dog, plenty of blackberries, and no fear of spoiling one's frock. Cheer up, mamma; I for one am longing for the morning."

A mere child! The talk is not to be weighed and criticised; it was said to comfort. That nursling had turned stronger of the two; bird-like sweetheart of the dead, could the man's fond ears have heard!

Suddenly, quiveringly alert, the mother raised ears, listened, strained eyes; all the garden swart and dusk, dark shadows on places where they had walked their last. Her nervously susceptible hearing had detected a footstep upon gravel, upon dry grass, upon leaves; soft, stealthy, receding from the bower of Virginia creeper near their window.

She closed this, pressed the child frantically to her heart. The drawing-room was unutterably desolate now, with cruel shadows lurking, and flitting of spectral things that trooped forth to mock and gibe at the friendless.

"Thanks, pretty; it is good of you to try and comfort poor mamma. Oh, my darling, I am so wretched, so very wretched!"

It was a wail wrung from the bleeding heart, an awful moan of despair at its utmost extremity.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERIOUS GIFT.

They were both timorous now that night had set in, alone in the desecrated house, far removed from any other habitation.

"Come, dear, we will not stay here; let us bolt the door and go up stairs."

Little Ella was naturally as nervous as a mouse, but she plucked her courage by the ears and made it lead; she even essayed a skip, but that broke short, it made such an unearthly sound on the floor of the empty room.

A gust of cold, dusty wind shot in at the door as she opened it, and went scouring round the place like the manes of an old char-woman.

The great hall with its two pillars looked sepulchral and ghostly, and the patter of their feet upon the stone echoed away with quavering monotone, like footfalls in the ghoul-haunted temples of India.

There was not even a rug to break the shivering glide over the white vastness that chilled as a polar plain.

The dull thud of the bolt and gibbet rattle of the chain filled the space with a thunderous din that caused them to leap with terror; it died away in time, crept out by the rear offices, muttering and grumbling.

Four large doors, a fleck of light from over the entrance shimmering on their knobs and polished panels.

Hand in hand—neither telling the other how tremulously—they crossed to the foot of the great stairs. Half-way up, a window of violet and green, yellow and blue, disposed an uncertain ghastliness, and turned their wan faces yet more livid and deathly.

She could recall times when these stairs were the ascent of a pageant of color, when her guests had trailed their sumptuous robing and taken lustre from the glass by gleaming of gems. Courtly men, stately dames, they had entertained in princely fashion, not one of whom would now pass her in a street while another thoroughfare was open. Society!

Above this a corridor, a line of guest-chambers, their own private apartments, and the tiny, nest-like boudoir apportioned to her daughter's use.

Here she would pass the still hours of that painful vigil, longing for the dawn. She could not sleep, she knew well; but, if possible, the child should do so while she watched protectingly.

It was only a mattress from a servants' room which the brutal mercy of the broker had spared for their comfort, upon hearing they would remain over the night.

Stripped boards, bared walls, shreds and chips of lost treasures that had made the chamber beautiful. Damp air was floating in at the lattice sorrow had caused to be neglected for the first time. Hideous hoof-prints where the vulgar had trodden, grimy and reeking of stables. Shivered glass of the bird-cage where the wretches had tossed her pet to its freedom—when a thin ridge of blood rose to the child's lips, but no moan or movement, other than warmer pressure of the hand she had held to her strong, brave heart. The mother shuddered upon returning to the scene of that horrible trial.

"Let me sit up with you, mamma, dear; I'm not in the least sleepy to-night."

"No, my darling, do you get your rest. First let me hear your prayers"—said with choking, for it would be the last time. She closed the door, the keys had been removed; her tottering limbs scarcely supported their burden.

"Now, darling." The child fell at those knees where she had knelt so often, although there had been nights—grand party nights—when this lady could not spare the time (she recalled each one thus given to her heartless visitors when her child and her God had been set aside, failing convenience—as if Society would make allowance for a young Church of England mother's feelings and obligations), when the little one had been reduced to the fidgety nurse-maid alternative, with hasty interruption midway of the sweet prayer: "Come, Miss Ella, make haste!" or a plucking at the night dress, and—"Don't be all night, if you please, miss!" Grooms were waiting in the kitchen, and High Life below stairs could scarcely expect my lady's maid to dilly-dally about while my lady's child said her prayers. Society hasn't come to that either.

She said all the little prayer, and "God bless dear mamma and papa," in her sad thoughtfulness forgetting, "and make me a good girl;" then the simple hymn, said since she had stood no higher than the lilies by the garden gate.

Then without a word, rising from her knees, she kissed her mother, put off her frock, and crept upon the uninviting couch stretched on the floor.

Graceful as some reclining figure in Athenian studio, the lady leaned back upon her elbow, took the small hand, bent over it, and for many minutes thus remained with lips sealing the wondrous love.

There was but little light, sufficient, however, to disclose the mournful grace of that pathetic picture, had any one been there to see.

All upon the impulse, unable to control herself any longer, the lady raised her head, looked little one in the eyes—swift, it was heart-lightning—and in a breath, a gasp, questioned her almost hoarsely:

"Could my Ella bear her mamma to leave her? Would you like to visit some one who would be very kind, where you would have dresses and presents good as those you have lost, and a beautiful garden to play in? A beautiful garden," added the ward of those happy days, recalling its devious, pleasant paths.

"I would not like to go any where without you, mamma; and what's more, *I won't!*"

The bare supposition was an outrage, and Ella resented it accordingly, and with more emphasis than it was her custom to display.

A smile, the first that day, broke upon the lady's features, yet an embarrassed, hesitating smile. How was this to be answered?

"But if I wished it, Ella?"

"If you were placed the same, or so that I could not help you, and should not be of use any longer, I would *try* to obey your wishes; it was papa's last word to me—'Always do as mamma wishes you, my dear little girl.'"

Tears were by this time filling the child's eyes; she kept them well from discovery by turning upon her side, as though tired. She was concocting an innocent scheme to assume sleep, thinking her mother might then snatch a little rest.

"And you would not forget your prayers each night, or to pray for dear mamma; you would not forget me, Ella?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Forget you?" murmured the child, reproachfully.

"Not think so much of kind, fresh faces that mine would grow less remembered?"

"No! Not if I did not see you until I was grown up, and came to live with you again forever! I am going to sleep now, ma, dear; kiss me."

She swooped as a leopardess, holding her whelp in peril, swoops upon her crouching young; she clung to her fiercely, and spent the fury of her love upon that long embrace.

"Good-night!" And she repeated, while the child settled down to her pretended slumber, "Good-night! And dream of guardian angels, darling!"

After that the room was strangely hushed, and the creakings of boards and attendant night sounds echoed the hollowness rampant every where. A lonely, unaccompanied night in a large, unfurnished house, isolated of site, encircled by grim firs, none living knowing of one's presence there, must be one of the most dispiriting watches man or woman can pass.

It was not without its terrifying influences upon this delicate lady, who had always been used to plenty of light and brilliance, warmth and companionship.

She started at the gentle course of mice within the wainscot; and the flapping of bats' wings against the window-pane affrighted the gaze bent on the star of hope.

The hour must be getting late. She had neither watch nor clock left whereby to tell, but she guessed by the circled hills where lights had all disappeared, and only that cold and stately star was left to bear her company. And the bats kept coming in the way of that.

Breathing of the child was heavier. The worn-out cherub, faint with hunger, wearied beyond measure, must have passed to sleep, to her pure dreaming of the angels.

Again, for the second time, the woman fancied she detected the sound of a footstep, and this seemed outside the door, pausing in the corridor at that spot. In mortal fear she recoiled as her glance *would* wander in that direction, and she tried to reason herself out of such fancies, and moved gently from the bed, that she might set these fears at rest. She quickly advanced to the door, with some trepidation opened it, and stood out upon the landing. Nothing was to be seen, and she was about returning to the room when she remembered that, upon closing the window at which they had been sitting, she had failed to clasp the latch. She would hurriedly descend to make all quite safe, and she softly closed the door, and as softly ran down stairs.

Now thoughtful Miss Ella, who had been doing a cat-sleep, was quite unprepared for this, and lay there panting in a pretty fear. To be all alone up stairs in existing circumstances was a fate she had never contemplated in her worst dread and most fearful expectancies. It was so dark, she scarcely dared open her eyes; so still, she scarcely dared breathe. She was at the very height of her feverish terror, the hot, suffocating minutes seemed hours, and the horror sat heavy as a nightmare, when suddenly her door re-opened, a muffled, shadowy something entered, groped for her bed, knelt, stooped its head, panting, with short breath and burning lips, and alighted with a swift, soft, maddening kiss upon the bud-like mouth it seemed as though it would consume: the child all the time still as though sleeping, but really benumbed by fear—not supernatural fear, but that which dreads the unknown danger coming with robbers and other midnight visitors, stock threats of stupid maids. Scarcely an instant did it stay, but leaving an envelope beside the child, departed; and she was wonderingly wide awake, staring at the door.

While this proceeded above, that which befell Mrs. Travers remains to be related. It was more of a task than she had anticipated, or rather she had given it such bare thought; but at the foot of the stairs her courage sank. She looked for her star, violet or green, yellow or blue, what matter so it be there? it was clouded. The darkness was more dense; no light now from above the door; each chamber black as the entrance to a tomb; and the wind howling without, rattling within, until the place seemed overrun by skeleton feet.

Guitar and harp had quivered in these rooms where the wolfish blasts were now on chase.

She hurried past, gained the drawing-room; the window was open; a man was stepping from the casement to the bed of flowers below.

Shrinking back, she caught sight of the dread face while he turned to close the window.

It was the face of her foe—Noel Barnard.

He had not seen her. He hastened with long strides across the garden, out by a little gate giving egress to a quiet Devon lane, and appeared as though looking for some one who might be concealed within the grounds. She noted the action as singular. What could induce him to take that unfrequented way—a way that conducted to the shore?

She quickly latched the window, and almost flew up stairs to her child, so alarmed was she at the presence of that man.

The child uttered a cry of delight, and when her mother had closed the door and drawn up their poor bed against it, the only barricade, she told the strange incident which had occurred during her absence.

Mrs. Travers was aghast. Half afraid, she took the contents of the envelope to the window, and read even by that light the word "FIFTY" very large upon two crisp notes, Bank of England.

She could not speak, but staggered to the bed, and now her strength gave way; she fell thereon, and still without one word.

Had she fainted, or what was this? With a cry of terror, the child, clinging and embracing, implored for but one word—but one! And all was still, save for the dirge-like, strangled echo of her appeal. Still, deadly still, and only that little girl! Alone, with this new and surpassing misery, and all the host of fears, and all the weight of her own and this other's sorrow, and the faint, deadly weariness and sickness of her own heart.

Beat against the panes, ye bats; coil, obscene shades, within the corners; shriek, ravenous winds, in the outer courts; gleam on her lovely head, coward lightning of the summer night; hoot, owls, on the funereal pines; fall, rain-drops, like taps upon coffin lids; peal above her, thunders of darkness; stretch forth lank talons, spectres and goblins; dart grisly fangs, glide on her, phantoms! Hound forth ye all, for 'tis a delicate girl-child whose mother lieth low, and there is none of human kind to help!

Ella was conscious of it all. Kneeling by the outstretched form beloved so utterly, she engaged in wonderful child prayer; then, by degrees, the uplifted hands drooped, the head bowed, and, like a flower borne over by its weight, the little form fell upon her mother's breast.

And Eagle Hall was silent as a mansion of the dead.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE KNIGHT OF THE ÆGEAN.

Ashton St. Aubyn, smoking a hookah, reclining upon a pile of skins; around him new books from India, latest publications of the Presidencies: tropical flowers, and broad-leaved plants, and clouds of gauze and lace shading the low, carven chamber, fragrant of woods as a spice *chalet* of the Southern Islands.

Lena at his feet, upon a cushion of Damascus, quaintly attired—as became their seclusion and his poetical taste, in style that was a blending of Moore, Byron, and Châteaubriand—in white cashmere and gold. And vastly pretty did Princess look, as upon one hand a bird of gorgeous plumage waited to be soothed with *bonbons* from the other.

Mr. St. Aubyn had been disturbed that morning, and was trying to smoke it off. He could not read; a parcel of magnificent drawings, recently received from Paris, remained unopened; the hound stole up and laid its cold nose upon his hand without caress.

Lena threw the choicest of the *bonbons* at papa, tossed off her bird, and curled herself indolently beside him on the tawny leopards, pulling at the tassel of his cap, at a dark chestnut curl astray below, at his olive velvet smoking-gown, trying to scatter his preoccupation.

"Don't let it trouble you, sweet. The man is not likely to return after such a message."

Lena had been sitting, as usual, at her silken embroidery in a *bosquet* of the garden, sometimes looking out to sea, thinking of all sorts of things blended of butterflies and sunbeams, when she became aware of the bobbing up of a head above the fence—a head unpleasant to look upon as

Cruikshank's Jack Sheppard; and the thing was such a wonder, she had still looked, and finally burst out laughing at it, and then tripped into the house, to tell grave papa over his books and papers.

All her life she had looked upon only his kingly beauty, and the white-haired clergyman of the benignant face, who sometimes called to see St. Aubyn, and she had no idea any thing as ugly existed in the world, as it certainly did not in her world of beauty and light. Therefore Princess made much of this, as children make of Punchinello.

Not so St. Aubyn. To his girl's surprise, he put her hastily from him, and bade her never sit within that part again, or within view of the fence any where; then melted to sudden tenderness, and kissed her, drawing the sunny head to his heart; but she felt that flutter like a bird ruffled at presence of the hawk.

Then he had strode with jerking pace, thoughtful, as of a general overtaken in his tactics, clutching at his gown convulsively, looping the cord, and muttering, "After all my pains, after all these years!" up to a small round spy-place—a side window set between the gables, whereby to reconnoitre the tangleway of the approach—and he saw the man astride the wall.

He had seen him before, long back in the years when this hermit was a beau in society, and the world was a court for the play of his imperial breeding; and the man was unaltered other than to become more villainous in appearance. The sight chilled him, and St. Aubyn turned passionately, to find the black and white face at his shoulder, composed, glacial, lady-like.

"A trespasser, I think," said as quietly as though "Another peach upon the southern wall."

The master was taken unawares.

"My dear Mrs. Brandon," seizing her arm, "oblige me by sending Williams to acquaint the man these grounds are strictly private—the owner permits no intrusion. He—he can speak civilly, you know; we live so isolated, this person, of course, is unaware."

The lady bowed and glided to oblige. He had not once fumbled so, and could not for the instant encounter those twin spears, her eyes. The black alpaca and snowy cuffs, and the marble face with its raven bands, disappeared among the stands of orange and citron, and the master waited while Williams went forth to parley.

And this was the interpretation of the civility, the servant, from accident or design, taking a fowling-piece in his hand:

"You'll please to drop off that fence, young man. My master didn't put that up for such as you to ride on."

Still the man had not moved—Williams trifling ominously with the gun. This antagonism might have been one of the lady's deep contrivings. St. Aubyn hung upon the issue of this impolitic course.

"Just tell your master Mr. John Beech will do hisself the pleasure of calling this hevening."

And the shock head bobbed, his ungainly form tumbled over, and the jagged line of boarding, with the level piles and joists, was clear of its unwelcome visitor.

This it was that had disturbed St. Aubyn more than he had been disturbed for nine long years. All day the hacienda was watched; at evening the great outer gate was doubly locked.

Lena's blandishments had failed to woo the student from his gloom. She had known him always reflective, sometimes taciturn, but never gloomy and melancholy, as he had been this long, disagreeable day.

She resented it finely. She had whispered to Mrs. Brandon, "Papa is so grumpy!" and then had run away to her favorite nook, a cavity at the very edge of the cliff. Here she had seated herself on the grass with a book, which she could dangle over the brink and read in mid-air, if she pleased; had trailed a slender white hand bird's-nesting, and caught up corners of the sandstone and wild garlands of pink and blue eyed blossom; had watched the glory of the sunset through a succession of majestic stages; and had made a discovery that set her thinking of other things than butterflies and sunbeams—so eventful a day was this to our Princess St. Aubyn.

She had discovered a vessel, of shape different to any she had ever seen; it was floating past, swan-like, white, with outspread wings curved beautifully, and a grace that thrilled.

Lena closed her book, dropped her flowers, let her hair fall unthinkingly all about her glowing cheeks, down to the flower-strewn pinnacle, and she watched at her ease, delighted, lazily—quaffing the nectar of that vast green garden of sea.

It was a yacht. Sunset on sails, on deck, on the young man lolling by the helm, on the telescope carried by the old skipper in attendance—it seemed a beautiful, unreal sort of picture, half belonging to the serried ranks of that golden pageant of cloud.

While the girl was taking this stolen view, she was not, as she imagined, unseen by this Knight of the Ægean, who had been long regarding the picturesque section of the coast.

Viewed from the water, the romantic cliff, towering above its fellows, clothed with verdure, tinted all down its rugged side by hand more cunning than a painter's, with the wide façade of that mansion upon its summit crowning the whole, was sufficient to warrant the keenness of his interest. Taking the glass, he examined the scene with more attentive scrutiny. To the fore, cresting the border-line, he detected a little face, like fallen fruit upon the grass, and the sway and scatter of hair, to which the ruby glow in the sky lent a wonderful radiance. Over this, many flowers and trees; behind the mansion walls rose, windows all a-gleam with crimson light, save one, where the ruby glare framed in a face and a figure that was black and was white, where the quiet woman watched and waited.

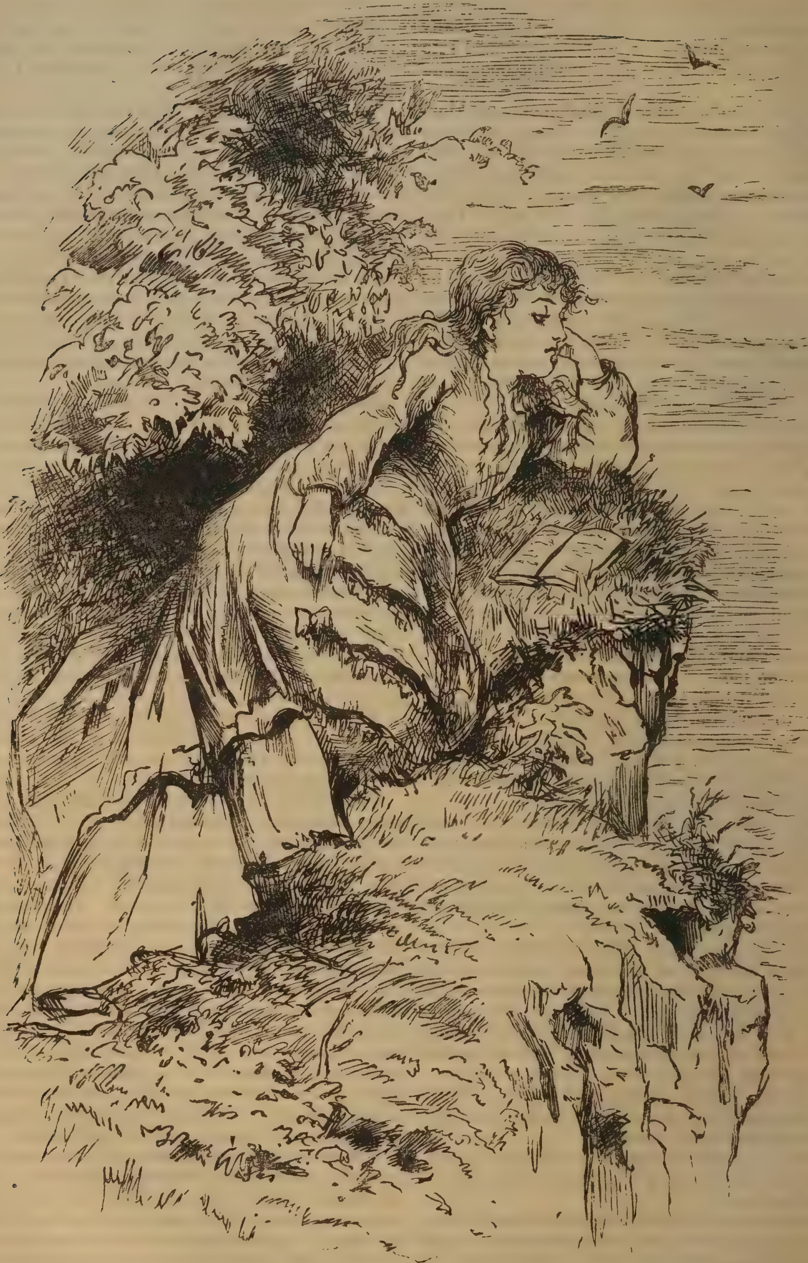
"Wonder who the old party is up at the window?" he said, laying down the glass and pacing the deck; "and I wonder what the little face upon the grass is like, come to be close to it? By Jove! An adventure after this monotonous cruise would be refreshing; this calmness of wind and smoothness of water bores one awfully. One might as well be back in the L. R. C."

"Brown" (to skipper), "whose place is that?"

"That, Mr. Arden? Why, it's your father's friend lives there, bless him! You've heerd talk of Mr. St. Aubyn, who's so good to the poor?"

"I know; he gives my father a sum of money every year to distribute. Rather a curious man, I believe. So that's his place, is it? What on earth led him to eyry like the eagles?"

"Well, that's no business of our'n, sure, Sir.



"HERE SHE HAD SEATED HERSELF ON THE GRASS WITH A BOOK."

He's not in the way, and the wall was blank enough afore, as I can remember, hav'n' done the waters sin' a lad."

"Married, eh?"

"'Gad no, Mr. William; he's too wropt up in his darter; and like a speret she is, and seldom seen. He never lets her out o' sight for long, I reckon."

"Strange I've not heard my father speak of these people; but then I've not been home long enough to hear all the gossip."

"Your father's a proper sort of a gentleman, Mr. William, and considering he's the only one as visits Mr. St. Aubyn, it isn't at all likely he'd chatter, if you was at home a sight of a time." And honest old Brown, the Yorkshire fisherman, quite unconscious of having said aught imperfect in the direction of either grammar or civility, went at the waves as though mowing down ridges of grass with a brawny arm. William Arden, the pet of his college, gnawed viciously at the end of a cigar; he was unaccustomed to reproof, least of all when at home with the kind old pastor of the village church.

"Brown," he said, slowly, "you're a bear!"

Then he lounged on the tarpaulin, leisurely took a note-book and wrote, repeating to himself, and looking up now and then at the cliff: "Misanthropic recluse—inaccessible hiding-place, built on steep rock, wall surrounding, high as house—fearful abyss—haunted cavern at foot—smugglers, lovely damsel incarcerated—recluse eaten of jealousy—spite of precautions, some fellow falls in love with Héloïse—blue fire—*dénouement;* think that 'll come in very well. Now, Brown, for dinner!"

And while his factotum was busied at the larder, this young scare-brain improved the shining hour by taking another glimpse of Hesperides.

The young lady was standing at about the same spot; by her side was a tall, dark, extremely handsome man. Even that distance revealed the remarkable cast of features; and the girl seemed protesting, pointing downward, shaking her head, and finally clinging about his neck with kisses.

"Disgraceful!" cried Mr. Arden; "and before the fishes!"

The gentleman had now caught sight of him, and dragged off the fair vision beyond power of his glass to follow.

"Brute!" quoth Ulysses, irreverently, and there being nothing else left, directed the lens toward the singular face at the window.

"Tragedy queen in repose," he murmured, "or dragon of the enchantment." Then, loudly, "Ready with the fowl, Brown?"

The old man answered the shout by one as lusty, and the owner of the yacht was in his tasteful little cabin at a stride. The dazzling roadway of surge and surf sent shafts to the silver cups and flagons; the wide western span of crimson and orange and opal was ploughed to a trail of gems; piles of luscious fruit tumbled the length of the snowy board; sherry-cups flashed from their facets, lips, and slender curved lines; bunches of ferns, feathery and fragile, bowed to each other in rhythm; and looking around, Mr. Arden confessed nothing but the fair girl was wanting to complete the picture.

The splash of the water his dining music, blown sea-bloom the perfume upon his table, yet he still thought a little voice would better it; and Somebody's voice of the cliff it should be.

"Bring up the bottled beer, Brown. You'll take a glass yourself, man?"

Then, as a curious sort of change, while Brown was busy at the lead and ice, he chanted one of the dirges to the sunset; a low, melodious tone in unison with the accompaniment:

"Can it be the sun descending
O'er the level plain of water?
Or the Red Swan floating, flying,
Wounded by the magic arrow,
Staining all the waves with crimson,
With the crimson of its life-blood;
Filling all the air with splendor,
With the splendor of its plumage?
Yes; it is the sun descending,
Sinking down into the water;
All the sky is stained with purple,
All the water flushed with crimson!
No; it is the Red Swan floating,
Diving down beneath the water;
To the sky its wings are lifted,
With its blood the waves are reddened!
Over it the Star of Evening
Melts and trembles, through the purple
Hangs suspended in the twilight."

They had steered beyond sight of the house; only the cliff loomed gray of outline, sharp and hard, dead of its glow, colorless.

Faint, far-off sound of a bell was heard ringing across the water.

William Arden walked to where the skipper was hoisting a sail—

"Mermaidens, admiral?"

The old man placed a horny hand to his ear and listened—

"The dinner bell at the big house on the cliff, Mr. William."

"Bless my soul! I'm very pleased; we'll dine together! By-the-bye, how's the wind?"

"Blows fresh—fresher nor all day. Keep outards, Sir?"

"No, on the board; I will see that place by moonlight. Have some tobacco?"

"Young master's taking a interest," muttered the seaman, plugging a pipe for himself; "I must furl wrong, for sink me if it's ship-shape pirating afore *his* house!" So dogged and devoted was the regard of the Yorkshire fishermen for the patron by whom they steered, by whom they swore.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNPLEASANT VISIT.

Mrs. Brandon sat sewing in one of the apartments called the evening drawing-room, it being the custom to pass the time there after dinner. A large dusk room, all massive graining and gold, dark-colored woods, paneled from the polished floor to the glistening brown rafters, lying back on the ceiling studded with golden stars upon a background of cerulean hue. An Indian carpet of grotesque design and fierce, hot colors covered a portion of the floor, and seemed an island of magic charms; at another part, a line of lion skins, the heads magnificently dressed for cushions, gave a tawny, un-English look to the singular interior. Two columns—solid trunks of Swiss mountain wood, arose at one end, where carved plantain leaves curled, affording rest for the waxen lights, a galaxy of which illuminated the rich coloring of this chamber. Between the plantains, looped by thick cords of twisted silk, were blue rep curtains heavily braided and embroidered with gold. St. Aubyn, although he had acquired Eastern and Continental tastes, was not of sensuous likings. He might have crowded this chamber with luxurious couches and ottomans, and all the indolent comfort of Persia and Turkey, but he rather cultivated the stern ease of Arabian simplicity—tanned skins, purple pillows of odorous herbs, burnished shields in lieu of mirrors, roughly moulded vessels of red ware, with iced and fragrant waters; uncouth jars formed of twined dragons, gold upon orange clay, wherein the cactus flowered brilliantly; tables of intricate wood-work, more suited to the summer-house, whereon volumes richly bound, a perfume in themselves, glowing with crimson and yellow and gold. The bronze mantel was loaded with curious glittering rock brought from stalagmitic chambers beyond two oceans, and with plumage of African birds, one wing of which was a picture.

Lena was lying upon one of the skins, inducing a kitten to leap from one to another in pursuit of a ball of silk.

Mrs. Brandon looked up from her needle-work.

"Had you not better get up, Miss Lena? I am afraid you will spoil your frock, new not a week ago." It was of rich black velvet, with costly black lace falling from the snowy shoulders.

"Mrs. Brandon, I will *not* be dictated to in that way; if I care to roll about after pussy, I'll do so. Come here, tit, tit, tit!" And the refractory young lady laid herself out the length of a lion defiantly, knotting its mane, fixing her chin firmly upon its head, and looking up over its great eyes, impudently as you please, yet all dimples and smiles.

Mrs. Brandon continued her sewing, not a muscle disturbed; her cotton broke, she repaired the line quietly, even sweetly.

"I'm glad I am not your mamma, my dear."

"Now I'll just tell papa that."

The lady started from her seat, dropping the work.

"Nay, my dear, I did but joke; pray do not worry your papa about any thing so trifling."

"I can't make papa out to-day at all; he seems upside down."

"I think he would say the same of his daughter, could he see her now."

"Really, Mrs. Brandon, you *are* rude!" (going a pilgrimage upon knees after the kitten's tail). "But that man this morning! And then being cross because I was watching that old boat—"

"Boat, my dear?"

"Well, little ship I might call it. It passed below near to the shore; nobody on board but a young gentleman and his man; they seemed to be enjoying themselves. I wished myself one of the party; how nice it must be! I feel so dull sometimes, Mrs. Brandon!" sitting up now, thoroughly in earnest.

The lady looked at her with the expressive eyes where sympathy, commiseration, and aroused interest were made to play upon the girl's heart with subtle effect.

"Poor child! I dare say. The most favored bird wearies of its cage sometimes."

Little in the words, and very gently said; but they sank deep.

"What a long time papa is smoking after dinner to-day! I'll go and see after him."

And half petulantly the little girl ran from the room.

Taking advantage of her absence, Mrs. Brandon removed a letter from her bosom. It had been received that morning; it bore the London post-mark, and it was signed

Noel Barnard.

The contents ran:

"Hortense,—The man Beech has turned traitor. He may visit yours. Prevent interview with either. His object will be extortion. I give you *carte-blanche* to a Thousand. An exposure may ruin the girl's best chance. She must inherit all or none."

"Not while I can prevent it, Mr. Noel Barnard! With all your cleverness, you may be circumvented yet. You don't know Hortense Brandon altogether, shrewd as you are. So you've thought these dull, patient years of waiting have been for you? Well, work on, until all your plans turn out addled and impotent."

A sound without of footsteps being toilingly dragged in the direction of the drawing-room, and the girl's laughing voice, "Nay, but you shall, papa; you are my prisoner, and shall come to judgment."

The door is dashed open, and St. Aubyn dragged in by the arm.

"Found him all alone, smoking that nasty pipe, and looking so blue through the smoke I hardly knew him. There, Sir!"

In a breath, gathering all her strength for one vigorous push, she sent him back on a sofa of crimson cloth, spread with a magnificent array of tiger stripes.

Mrs. Brandon, quite gently, and as a matter of course, laid down the work, walked to the remote extremity of the polished boards without so much as a footfall being heard, brought back the latest received *Calcutta Quarterly*, placed it upon the sofa beside him, unloosed a calabash containing juice of limes and iced water, always hanging within reach of his favorite couch, placed a glittering Algerian tray and coffee service upon one of the small tables, and a fine cambric handkerchief, which she dipped in attar, beside the journal.

"Thanks, Mrs. Brandon—many thanks!"

Their eyes met, and this time she lowered hers, coy and timid, yet with appearance of thus veiling infinite devotedness.

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon does so much for you, papa! and I do nothing—except pull your beautiful curls."

Sitting on edge of the sofa, half crying, Lena looked so prettily disconcerted, St. Aubyn said,

"Mrs. Brandon is naturally thoughtful, my love."

"Well, and Mrs. Brandon's paid to think, and thinks to be paid."

And jumping upon his knee, the speaker sat enthroned, and stared the ghastly face of her rival completely out of countenance. Mrs. Brandon might or might not have been displeased; nothing was seen of it but a trifle more paleness.

"Lena, dear, I will not have you rude."

"Oh, of course, papa, take Mrs. Brandon's part."

A hammering at the great outer gate stopped further parley, and caused the inmates of the drawing-room to look at one another.

Presently came Williams, with a half-scared face, saying,

"The Man, Sir!"

Mr. St. Aubyn arose with dignity.

"Inform this person that no strangers are admitted to my house at this or any other hour."

And he sat down with assumed calmness he was far from feeling, an agitated, restless movement of the hand, the fingers contracting with a nervous grip, the teeth meeting with firm resistance.

Mrs. Brandon walked to the mantel-piece with the subdued mien one wears when something unpleasant is upon the tapis. She leaned a hand upon the bronze, and clinked quartz against mica, and feldspar with gneiss, and seemed as unconcerned as any body between there and Scarborough.

Williams returned, this time looking troubled.

"What now?" asked St. Aubyn, impatiently.

"When I'd got back, Sir, I found him this side the gate. I said, 'You ain't bin long doing that little job, young man!' He said, 'I'm used to this work, I am.' So, what *you* think, Mr. St. Aubyn, I don't know; but what I thinks is this—that he's come a-robbin', and I'm for locking him in somewhere till we can cart him over to York."

Further suggestion was delayed by a snap, of the bull-dog species, at the speaker's ear, which swung him completely round and into the hall, while the subject of his blunt advice marched his hobnails over the polish. Williams was upon the point of resenting this, when a look from his master as he raised his hand stayed further assertion of his sense of manliness.

"What am I to understand by this intrusion?" St. Aubyn asked, without rising, or presenting any marked discomposure.

"Well, fust, you knows me, in course?" he said, lodging a low-crowned, battered, and brown old hat under the left arm.

"I have seen you before—many years ago. Shut the door, Williams, if you please; you can leave this person with me."

"Oh yes, you can leave this person with your master, young man; 'tain't the fust time we've bin left alone together."

And Mr. Beech turned—turned insolently—as quits again. Williams sorrowfully obeyed. He was attached, as servants do become, to the hand that feeds and pays liberally.

"Lena, go with Mrs. Brandon, dear, to the music-room. I will rejoin you very shortly."

Mrs. Brandon came gravely, decorously, from the mantel, passed John Beech with a meaning dart from the hard black eyes, and with a low, affectionate, "Come, my love!" took the girl's hand to lead her from the room. But Lena was in a sort of daze. From removal of the man's hat she had never ceased to look at his face, as though trying to remember something—to trace the flitting shadow of a memory; and it was dreamily, reluctantly, she allowed herself to be conducted from the room.

"How little miss be grown! And seems to remember me, belike."

St. Aubyn made no reply to this, but began pacing the room irritably; fretting under this new experience of a type to which he was quite unaccustomed.

"You will be good enough to make this interview as short as you can."

"Well, arter comin' two hund'ed an' fifty mile in a horse-box, and clamberin' a fence nigh another two hund'ed an' fifty mile, I ain't likely to cut it short till I've said all I've got to say, or to go till I've got all I come to get."

"Perhaps you'll say what that is?"

"Well, it's money—that's wot for one thing; and purlite treatment—that's wot for another."

"The first is soon settled; the second you will find settled also in a summary manner, if you attempt too great familiarity. Therefore stand upon your guard and distance."

"It's threats, is it?" exclaimed Beech, raising his voice. "Oh, come, my fine-feathered master, you'll find that won't do!"

"No noise here, if you please, unless your purpose is to acquaint my household with our business. I think, all things considered, we'll talk it over in the garden."

"As you like."

The windows opened on to the lawn; there was, therefore, rapid and noiseless egress. St. Aubyn traversed a side path, shaded by laurels, leading off from the house to a sufficient distance for unheard conversation conducted in however high a key.

"Now, Sir!"

The master sat on an old clump that looked black as bog-oak in the dense shade, what struggling light there was as yet but making the darkness still more dark. Right away east, however, a great ball of red was rising with gradual splendor, presently to light up the land and sea with silvery fairness.

"Well, of course you thought by securing yourself and your property round about like this to be free of every body livin', and it's sorry I am to disturb the peace and 'appiness of this charming abode; but bizziness must be attended to, and it was quite by haccident I learnt yer whereabouts. How nice and comfortable you managed things! I might 'a bin poking about down at Sleperton a good while afore you turned up there, my lord."

"Silence! Do you not know that title died with the name to which it was attached? When I quitted the world, Sir, and gave myself to this cherished project, it was not to play with old memories and old sorrows."

The tone was so mournful, so inexpressibly sad, even that brutal tormentor paused for an interval.

"Maybe I may ask if your experiment has brought the 'appiness expected, Sir?"

"Fully! The child, under my careful training, has changed her whole nature; no one would judge her an offspring of the people; beauty, grace, and many other acquired and cultivated accomplishments help to make her all that I could desire. Of her love for myself I will not speak, although it is, of course, the principal matter; but that you would not understand."

"Don't wrong me," murmured hypocrite in the rough; "you can't tell my feelin's jist now as she stood afore me a-trying her purty memory. I could 'a took her to my 'art at that moment, and cried, 'Forgive, forgive a father's hagitation!' Only thought you mightn't like it; keeping all so quiet from every body."

"What are you doing now, John Beech? You don't appear to be still in the service of that gentleman, the Indian writer; what was his name? I've forgotten."

"Mr. Barnard," replied John Beech, huskily. "No, I've left his service; I'm on my own hook now—"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Opened in bizziness. A shop."

"Beer, I suppose?"

"Birds," answered the man, dryly; "canaries and sich like furren birds. Catch 'em over Lea Bridge; shop's in Vinegar Street, Hackney Road, when you're inclined to patronize."

Lighter became the mist that overhung the sea; all the face of garden and rock was discernible; the two men thus curiously connected became more distinct to each other's view.

"Bird-catching hasn't improved your appearance, I think."

"That's left for you to do, Mister St. Aubyn. I want to take a cool five thousand home with me for bird seed."

"That is a large sum; out of all proportion—"

"Not for what you're paying for;" and the little, glittering, ferret-like eyes of the extortioner fixed and transfixed his man.

"Let us walk, it is chilly;" and St. Aubyn set up a brisk movement shiveringly, and with nervous twitchings, as though ague had come of that bog-oak.

John Beech assented; he was very adaptable, and decidedly sociable.

"You must quite understand, my good man, I have no time for jesting."

"Certain and poz it is I'm in little form for fun myself. I mean what I say, and I'll have it or split."

"Then you stand a fair chance of performing the latter. I beg to inform you, once for all, I am not to be intimidated into giving you five thousand pounds to keep for one week a secret you would divulge the next if the same blackmail failed to be forth-coming. When I agreed, or rather desired, to provide for this child, which you then assured me, in compliance with my express stipulation, was the daughter of refined although poor parents; when I became her guardian — pleased and satisfied with her appearance in every way—and adopted her, having been basely robbed of my own, my honor betrayed, my love foiled, my reputation tarnished, then I paid to you, and through you to her parents, the sum of one thousand pounds; and this, I was assured by your own lips, amply satisfied you all, and especially the people whom you represented as grateful beyond measure at the prospect of their child being so well provided for. Now you speak of the girl as your own. What am I to think?"

"This, Mister St. Aubyn, that if you don't choose to hand me the moderate sum I axed for, I'll have my girl back."

"That, if she comes of such a viper brood, is the best thing you can do." And becoming quite angry, St. Aubyn strode away, and gazed vacantly across the wide expanse of water. A world of anguish was betrayed, a breaking heart; but it should break before he lived in life-long fear of a man like this. He had that in his composition which would never tolerate victimizing; he would shoot him first, as one of his sharp-toothed tigers. The pale, handsome face shone with a grand passion. That love of his for Lena, who so innocently supposed herself his own, passed the telling by words. He never paused to ask himself if he could resign her. Had he done so, he knew the reply would have miserably weakened his anger. For that love he had fenced his house about, that she should be wholly and solely his own, that he should be spared a second betrayal in his life, and that her love for him should be disinterested and of the highest type. It should be that of a daughter, until she was of age to hear the revelation from his lips. But this dilemma he was unprepared for; his only fear had been that by some mischance she should see some other, who by newer, fresher charm would weaken his own hold upon her heart. Thus, when he had come upon her on the grass, watching the yacht, it had really been more of a catastrophe and trouble than the ill-timed visit of this man, which, unlike the other, a question of pounds would settle. As a child she had stolen upon his bruised and bleeding heart with a wondrous fascination, and without a shade of pain. That time was all a dream of sweet and playful innocence; but with years came deeper joys and graver pleasures, and he knew a happiness that transcended all he had desired. The girl had beguiled him of every care, charmed him with merriment, soothed him with tenderness, and in the native graces of her character and her liveliness of disposition he had been contented with her origin; indeed, had bestowed at most but a passing thought thereon. To hear this ruffian claim kinship with so bright and beautiful a being was a rude shock, and it chilled St. Aubyn to the soul. Painful experience had made him morbidly sensitive. He knew if this were true he could no longer feel the same warmth of loving interest in her, and such a barrier would be unbearable. Yet he could not disprove it. The man had transacted the whole affair upon a liberal consideration. Lena herself had evident glimmering of an old recollection that *might* be an affectionate one. Horrible!

The red of the great shield was changing to orange, and the garden was flecked with light and shade. They could see the broad expanse of sea cleared of its mist lying calm as a park of primroses in spring. Beech had followed him to the extremity of the walk, where shrubs formed a dusky screen to the bare brink of the precipice.

That very day he had stood at this spot with his darling, beauty beaming from her eyes, blushing from her cheeks, glowing upon her hair, trembling in her voice, the exquisite beauty of childhood. Oh, it was impossible this man could be the father of such a creature! And there by the brink he confronted the man, and took his ground on a firm denial.

"But—I—do not believe your assertion, John Beech. You are no more the parent of that child than is the evil one himself."

Mr. Beech laughed a hard, dry laugh; there was a rustle among the laurels, a withered echo of the dead leaves, a discordant tumbling of earth where the conies frolicked up the cliff.

"Perhaps you'd like me to ask if she remembers any thing of that time, Mister St. Aubyn? Or perhaps you'd like a magistrate's opinion upon yer hiding a 'spectable man's child in a hout-o'-the-way place like this? Take my adwice and pay down with no bother, and I pledge you not to trouble for a long time to come. Of course I must see the little gal once in a way."

"I dispute your right to see her at any time, and you never shall, if I can prevent it—"

"Now look you 'ere, best not make a henemy of me; one's gone an' done it a'ready, wuss luck for him!"

"I have no interest whatever in your quarrels, or in any thing concerning you—"

"But I have!" The tall form of Noel Barnard here appeared crashing through the laurels. "Your pardon, my lord, for this unceremonious interference. I knew of this scoundrel's designs, and am here to check his infamous audacity. I happen to know the parents of the young lady to whom you've proved so generous a benefactor, and beg to assure you their station, or that of her mother, is, emphatically, of rank equal with your own. One day I may be in a position to enlighten you further."

"Thanks, Mr. Barnard; you are indeed a friend in need. Your sometime servant was pinning me in a corner."

"So I see," and the singular man cast a rapid glance at their dangerous proximity to the verge; then turning authoritatively to Beech, who had several times essayed to speak, and was apparently charged with a volume of exposure, said,

"Leave the premises—as you entered!"

"Never, till I've the money—"

"Be careful—"

"I am, Mister Noel Barnard, and saving; and —I allus pays my debts."

"Then pay this, Beech!" and without more ado, and with a giant's grasp, he hurled the man forward, down, through the shrubs, over the brink of the precipice. St. Aubyn stood horror-stricken, if relieved, at the summary judgment. These men were sportsmen; both had scoured the jungles and been in at many a death; but this incident, on his own property, was very repulsive to St. Aubyn.

"Couldn't have done it myself," he remarked, sententiously.

"Thought I might have occasion," replied the other, coolly, turning down his cuffs. "How's the tide?" leaning over. "A yacht yonder; yours?" —pointing out the vessel just gliding again into sight.

"No," said St. Aubyn, with a shudder; "but come in; permit me to renew an acquaintance made in India, such as it was—"

"You are kind! I think I will, as it's late. Perhaps your housekeeper could shake me up a bed—be off by sunrise—very pleased to have been of service. I thought I should. That old rock served admirably; quite a Tarpeian sensation for that miserable parent. A most unprincipled fellow, who will be missed only in the lowest purlieus of our overcrowded metropolis. Front of your house, I presume? Quite a regal building. I congratulate you very much. Light up stairs—Miss—St. Aubyn? Retiring probably—very good —early hours—healthy and wealthy and wise."

A shadow crossed the blind.

"My daughter's companion, Mrs. Brandon."

"Brandon—Brandon—bless me—name's familiar—highly pleased to see the amiable members of your household, I'm sure—meet so many people who are not amiable. Long journey, hope you'll excuse travelling costume. What's this?—jessamine? My favorite plant, as I live!"

He had placed himself as though he also would take root, hands on hips, strong and tree-like, but gnarled and of uncomely growth. Their voices had been heard, the window-sash of the music-room was thrown up, the thick curtain drawn aside, and there, in front of the twinkle of tapers, and color, and gleaming, stood Lena, the beams of the full moon pale upon her brow.

"Oh, pa, dear, what a time you've been! I thought you were never coming."

"Ve-ry pretty, ve-ry!" Mr. Barnard spoke hoarsely.

"Yes, I planted it the first year of our coming." While Mr. Barnard bobbed his head beneath it, eyes all aslant on Somebody's daughter.

They passed to the drawing-room, and the master rang the bell. The visitor nodded pleasantly to Williams.

"I stood a fair chance of not being admitted; your faithful fellow seems watchful as Cerberus. It was not until I partly disclosed my business that he would raise the portcullis."

"Supper, Williams—the best our larder will provide. We are so unaccustomed to those social honors, visits, that I am afraid the best is but poor." Addressed to the visitor, who was sitting with his long legs stretched out, leisurely examining some Indian photographs.

"Funny old place, this Buddhist digging. I was fishing off Elephanta. 'Ever done the Temple?' said one of the party. Some had, some hadn't; agreed to make for the caves; cool, sandy, and swarming with blear-eyed snakes; I took a drawing of that expressive ancient Siva and his cobra also. Some thief stole my gold pencil-case, and a gnat as long as a scorpion stung the tip of my nose. Ah! Miss St. Aubyn, I presume—delighted, I'm sure!" And he arose with much courtliness to the advance of the beautiful girl, his back to the light, his face to the shadow, holding forth a long, sinewy hand that looked as if it had come up white from stretching on the rack; it was the only part of him on which the light shone, and it was a weird part, like a reptile in marble, or a corner chipped off somebody's sepulchre. Instead of taking the hand, Miss St. Aubyn stood transfixed by the shadowy face. Then she crossed to papa, watching this by-play wonderingly, and she whispered to him, Mr. Barnard recoiling his hand into the recesses of its cuff,

"That's the face I've seen so often in my dreams. What does it mean, papa? Why should I dream of him? Why is he here? Where is the other dreadful man?"

Mr. St. Aubyn was confused. He said, aloud,

"My little girl has a faint recollection of your face, Mr. Barnard. My love, a very old friend of—of our family."

"Oh, ve-ry!" and Mr. Barnard chirped soothingly to one of the stuffed birds. "Why, on my honor, thought it was alive! How art deceives one!"

Mrs. Brandon entered quietly, and with much composure walked across the room, taking up her work as though but that instant laid down.

"Mr. Barnard—Mrs. Brandon."

He rose and ceremoniously bowed. She arose and ceremoniously courtesied. They sat down again, and the lady resumed her sewing.

Then Williams appeared.

"Supper is served, Sir, in the breakfast-room." They generally supped there; it was smaller and more cozy. Mr. St. Aubyn gave his arm to his daughter. Mr. Barnard stopped behind an instant; he was scrutinizing a work of elaborately carved leather nailed on one of the panels. Then he gracefully turned: "Ah! beg pardon!" and offering an arm to Mrs. Brandon, the procession moved on.

"What a wretch you are!" she whispered to him, playfully pinching his arm. They were crossing the hall of many woods. He smiled upon the quiet woman—smiled down on her, for he was so tall—an august smile, false as the glimmer upon those far-reaching cedars.

It was an elegant repast, despite there being nothing in the house, and Williams, all decorum, stood behind his master's chair, attentive as the first of the school of St. James's. It was so very pleasant now that the moon was high and unclouded, Miss St. Aubyn begged the shutters and curtains might be drawn aside.

"Are you not a little afraid of the chilliness, my love?" and St. Aubyn looked restlessly in the direction of the hidden garden.

"I believe it is a dry air to-night—very pleasant!" and Mr. Barnard assisted Mrs. Brandon to a little jelly.

St. Aubyn nodded permission, and the man unclosed the casement. The master's hound came smelling round Mr. Barnard, and growled: exit hound by way of the window.

"Miss St. Aubyn, may I pass you some jelly?" He was wonderfully polite, not in the least strained; it was all natural.

"I suppose the great world stands where it did, Mr. Barnard?"

"You allude to the fashionable world? Oh, very much so! Plenty stirring."

"What is the government? It's five years, I think, since I saw an English newspaper."

"Bless me! Is it possible? No interest in politics?"

"Not the slightest; it would be the last thing I should occupy five minutes over. What say you, Mrs. Brandon?"

"A grand science, Mr. St. Aubyn!" and the quiet woman laid a knife down carefully and without noise, and a fork as gently, and crossed a spoon to the pattern of the damask as though evolving a problem.

"Ah, wait till you're gray-haired, my dear Sir; you're bound to come to it in the latter days."

"If I waited until then, I should give preference to the Church, and leave care of the state to younger men."

"Very good; I was intended for the Church myself—'bound to be a bishop,' said my father. My mother had my night-gowns made of lawn, and would have me stand in front of her every evening before bed, reading the burial service from the Prayer-Book—"

Here some confusion was caused by the hound running in with an old brown hat, low-crowned, and much battered. Williams having removed this with the tongs, order was restored.

"You were just at an entertaining point of your history, Mr. Barnard; pray continue."

"To be sure—going to tell you. May I trouble you for the Cayenne, Mrs. Brandon? Many thanks. Finding my prejudices biased in favor of the bar, that idea was abandoned in the forensic interest. I forget if I practiced to any large extent, and the memoranda of that early period were consumed at a fire, where I lost a lot of property and valuable documents. Let's see; wasn't I connected with the law when I knew you at Calcutta? Dear me, no! I was editing the *Nabob*, and a pretty mess I made of it; took the rice and indigo side too, disposed of all the valuable plant, and returned to England. One wants to be thoroughly unprincipled to—to— Shall I help you to a little curry—it *is* curry, I think? Bless my soul, it's sweet sauce! Well, I think I must— Beg pardon; what's that?"

All listened, Williams stood silent; the steel cold eyes of Mrs. Brandon darted to the face of Noel Barnard, played an instant, and stole back. St. Aubyn placed a hand to his ear and, painfully intent, listened with hearing at its utmost tension. Lena trifled with her wine-glass, and wondered what had come to the people. It was heard again, the shout of some person in extremity, afar, they could scarcely tell the direction, then all was still. Mr. Barnard, paring a slice of cheese,

"Fisherman to his mate probably—dangerous coast."

Mrs. Brandon here rose from the table, praying her departure might be pardoned—a troublesome headache to which she was subject these warm months.

"Thunder in the air," said Mr. Barnard, with much gallantry, opening the door for the lady to pass forth. He knew as well as possible she had been playing him false; he knew by that shout John Beech had escaped, that, separately or together, these two would henceforth be toiling to enmesh him; he knew their counter-schemes would ere long be many, that the hunters would press him sore. From afar he scented battle, and laughed the foe to scorn. The chase had ever thrilled him with wild ardor; this promised to be exciting, this war with high and low society. He knew Beresford Travers, Garston, and Co. were endeavoring to checkmate him on the great intrigue-board. Yet it was no vulgar adventurer they and others were tracking and seeking to outwit; they were conscious of this, and paid him the compliment. And while in a variety of quarters men and women were working to entoil the schemer, he coolly returned to his seat to—enjoy the liberal evening repast at the house on the cliff? The old vintages removed from an older mansion, where cellars dated from the accession of Hanover? Nay, but privately to feast eyes and hearing upon the beauty of Somebody's daughter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DRAMATIC READING AT THE PAVILION.

Three of them, selected for the invariable glossiness of their appearance and persuasive manners, had waited upon the Rev. Westley Garland to solicit his aid and interest for the charity they represented—a fashionable charity, well sustained by the polite, on whom was neither spot nor blemish. And there had been discussion as to whether some one of more established principles would not do as well for the purpose they had in view (he had been seen suspiciously near to a Methodist's house only the day before). But no; there was not a reader in the church as popular or as likely to replenish their exchequer. So they waited upon him, sent up word "a deputation," and three cards on the waiter; and stood just within the little drawing-room, each with a hat behind him, feeling important and conscious of their authority, and pluming for the impressive. Servant came down. Mr. Garland would see the gentlemen. Would they walk this way? They walked, stood in the presence of the great reader, were requested to take seats, and did so. One put hat under chair, one on knee; the third, as of bolder type, would place it on the table, but, not finding space, for books, extinguished, with characteristic taste, an exquisite statuette.

"We are sorry to trouble you, Mr. Garland; knowing how valuable your time is" (the preacher courteously waved his hand, as signifying no trouble), "myself and friends desire to apologize for this intrusion" ("myself and friends" nod heads as conscious of the intrusion), "which we feel convinced, with your uniform goodness, you will condone in recollection of our high and philanthropic object."

The foreman had spoken this little bit before his toilette-glass until perfect. His colleagues looked on with mute admiration. One of them blew a nose accustomed to overawe a board of guardians.

"To what cause am I indebted, gentlemen, for the honor of your visit? Your names are familiar to me in connection with town matters."

"Oh, precisely! We have had the honor many years; myself—I say it with diffidence—almost a lifetime. I am Mr. Bubb. My dear friends here, respectively, Mr. Lurch" (Mr. Lurch stands up, glossy and smiling); "you have heard of Lurch's far-famed Tonic Ale, I am sure, Sir?" (Mr. Garland bows politely, yet a little distantly; he opines it is a commercial visit.) "And Mr. Ebenezer Wriggle" (Mr. Wriggle stands up, glossy and smiling), "the name is known to you?—Old Mr. Wriggle did much for our town; he was upon—in fact, upon every thing; his son is a worthy successor. I have the honor to introduce to you Mr. Ebenezer, sole surviving representative of the firm—Pickles, Sir, and Fish Sauce!" (Mr. Garland bows still more distantly; the party is not much to his taste.) "We may as well announce at once the honored purpose of our visit, of which you should have been favored with a notice; but owing to some extraordinary oversight of our secretary's, the communication was omitted until too late, and" (smiling) "here we are!" (Mr. Wriggle looks across to Mr. Lurch as indicating a happy hit.) "We are, so to speak, ambassadors, Mr. Garland. We are here on behalf of the Mariners' Provident Association; patrons, the Duke of Mainwaring, the Earl of Comdarlington, Lord Pepper, the Hon. Frederic Glover, the Duchess of Mainwaring, the Countess of Comdarlington, Lady Pepper, the Hon. Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover, and many other patronesses of high standing. My wife, Mrs. Bubb, has the distinguished honor of acting as correspondent of the Ladies' Committee. Mrs. Bubb would have waited upon you to-day with us, only we imagined it scarcely consistent with the etiquette observable; but I have brought Mrs. Bubb's photograph; you will permit me to introduce Mrs. Bubb to your notice? I am only sorry our religious opinions differ, or we would unite with you in the inspiriting worship of one beneficent Creator at your church." (And the foreman takes a slant look over to his brethren, in search of encouragement; but Mr. Lurch is looking very surly, while the other is watching a fly upon the ceiling. Then Mr. Bubb plunges.) "We have called, Sir, to solicit your most generous co-operation" (Mr. Garland unlocks a small drawer of escritoire). "No, Sir, not that!" (with dignity, as resenting the mercenary). "It is by means of a Reading from the Poets and Humorists, or some original composition of your own, that you can help us. The Music-room, Royal Pavilion, is at our disposal; but experience has proved the capacity of the room to be inadequate to the public demand for admission upon occasion of your readings, Mr. Garland: it is therefore the intention of the committee, upon happily securing your sanction, to engage the Dome, which, upon pressure, will accommodate three thousand persons; half the area we propose to issue guinea tickets for, the remainder half a guinea; gallery, five shillings." The preacher smiled wearily, yet kindly.

"You are welcome to my services. But do you suppose Brighton is to be so exorbitantly taxed for hearing a man read?"

"It is generally admitted, Mr. Garland, a guinea is not too much for the pleasure of hearing you read: the end justifies the figure." And Josiah Bubb, Silk-mercer, looked as though he had said a very clever thing over a remnant.

"Perhaps you would favor us at your convenience with a draft of the pieces to be read, for the advertisements?"

"Must advertise, I suppose, Mr. Bubb?" asked the clergyman, pleasantly.

"Can't do any thing without it in a public way." (Chorus of Tonic Ale, Pickles, and Silk.)

"I think you gave me the option of something original? I have two or three dramatic selections, written some time ago, by which I set affectionate store. As these will be quite fresh, they will, perhaps, please better than the oft-read, well-known pieces. For a guinea your audience will expect something new, Mr. Bubb."

Thus, all being settled, the deputation retired, highly gratified with the result of the visit.

They proceeded at once to the curator's residence, to ascertain forth-coming engagements, and to secure the magnificent hall.

Then three heads were put together in the mercer's office, and a production concocted, which, after being submitted to several highly critical opinions, and weighed and considered in various bearings, and revised and amended in others, broke upon the startled town in this wise:

DOME,

ROYAL PAVILION, BRIGHTON.

DRAMATIC READING,

BY THE

REV. WESTLEY GARLAND,

IN AID OF

THE MARINERS' PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION.

ON THURSDAY, JULY 30, AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

Admission: Reserved Seats, One Guinea; Area, Half Guinea; Outer Circle and Balcony, Five Shillings. Tickets of the Secretaries, of Messrs. Cramer, and at the Doors.

"It's neat and to the point," said Mr. Bubb, as he stood at the Pavilion gates before one of the announcements. "Good wine needs no bush. We shall have a bumper."

So it proved, at least in perspective, the whole of the reserved tickets being exhausted on the day of issue, and Mr. Bubb and his colleagues had even slyly despoiled the next five rows. The rush for these, if more leisurely, was not less cordial. It was evident great interest had been aroused, the pleasantest anticipations excited. Nobody cared very much for the Provident Association, but Westley Garland happened to be the idol. Had the idol been broken, and sixpence wanted to repair the breakage, nobody would have found one for the purpose.

Mr. Blake, upon hearing of the Reading, wrote Mrs. Blake as follows:

"My dear Margaret,—Having a budget of news, I snatch half an hour to tell you how we are going on. Business is quiet. Dr. Hollroyd in yesterday, says the town is very dull, none of his people are back. Spite of which, they've induced Mr. Garland to risk a Reading; it comes off on the 30th, to-morrow week. Mr. Garland himself called, very politely, and brought tickets for you, me, and Rose, for which I am sure he paid three guineas. Just like him to do so. He inquired particularly how you and Pet were, and when you thought of returning; and if I was writing, I was to kindly tell my little girl he has a pair of love-birds for her. Very thoughtful, I'm sure. You will be surprised to hear Lady Guilmere is recovering rapidly. There is something mysterious about this. She was given over by her own medical men and those from town, when Mr. Garland commenced daily visits, sometimes twice a day. (I learn this from her footman.) Improved symptoms set in, and her ladyship's condition bettered daily and hourly. (I learn this from the maid.) And now her ladyship is rapidly approaching convalescence. Between you and me (and this is strictly private, better not to mention it before Rose), I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Garland and her ladyship make a match of it. But you will be looking for my fashionable news. Well, first and foremost, Brighton will have its queen, or I should write empress, this coming autumn. Any thing more superb, as you will say, has never been seen in the South, or any other part, for that matter. She only arrived from Paris yesterday. They have quite a retinue. Some of the servants are darkies, and I understand their luggage has Indian labels on in plenty, with Benares, Dacca, Poonah, Baroda, Lahore, Agra, Nagpoor, Mirzapoor, Tanjore, Allahabad, Rampore, and Calcutta. (I had this from one of the hotel servants—they are staying at the Bedford until their house is prepared. Grundens are talked of as the furnishers.) The future leader of our fashions, and we shall know what style is this season, is Lady Helen Darrell, of Darrell Abbey—a place somewhere in the Lake district, which has been closed during some years' absence abroad. (One of the chamber-maids told me this, she had it of her ladyship's maid, or one of them, for there seem to be half a dozen.) They were going on to Cheltenham, and may do so yet, something at the last moment having altered her ladyship's designs. I am told she is capricious, passionate, and violent; but I saw nothing of this the time she was in the shop (for we have been honored thus early). Came in with most imperious majesty, sweeping from the carriage. Velvet dress of dense crimson, and an elegant wrap of some sort. Not a scrap of ornament; no jewelry. Haven't time to write you more description, but hope you will soon be home to see this paragon. The Reading will be a good opportunity. Sure to be there. I'm told she goes to every thing. There is an elderly man in attendance, as dry as an old walnut, of whom nobody takes any notice, and Lady Darrell cursorily alludes to him as 'his lordship.' He is believed to be her father.

"But I must be closing. Smith being out for his holiday, I am rather tied. We are managing indifferently well in the house. The girl will not learn how to cook a steak, I suspect, if we keep her another ten years.

"Tell Rose I shall expect lots of sea-weed and pretty shells. No doubt you are enjoying yourselves finely; I quite envy you the cool breezes on the sands. It is dreadfully hot here. I take my constitutional every morning over the Downs.

"With love to yourself and Rose, and kisses to both, Your affectionate husband,

"Joseph Blake.

"P. S.—Will meet you in town any day you appoint for your return, and we will take a stroll round the Yard to look at the shops. Tell Pet she has not written me even one little note this time."

Of course the popular preacher heard of the unprecedented rush for the tickets, and, as a matter of fact, it moved him not one jot or tittle; and not a quarter as gratefully as would have done an orphan's broken thanks, a widow's tearless gratitude. Where the committee worked for their own honor and glory, and the public paid to hear a great orator, the man himself, perhaps, was the only individual sympathizer with the destitute mariners.

"It ought to be a treat, my love, for he is a most accomplished reader. I assure you Society is quite at his feet."

Thus Lady Comdarlington to Lady Pepper, and of a man who estimated their race and class as of very slight value; of a man with a broken heart, whose life was devoted purely to aiding the troubled; a man to whom adulation was as smoke, and the symbol of applause a weather-vane; who would have read as faultlessly beneath the sky on the beach to the fishermen as to the aristocratic flock the magic of his genius drew about him.

He listened to no party feeling ever, but was hand in hand with each in all Christian charity; and when the vulgar aired their audacity by such comments as, "We are only sorry our religious opinions differ, or we would unite with you in the inspiriting worship of one beneficent Creator at your church," he would smile very kindly, wondering a little, but not angered, and would have joined in their own service an hour afterward with much willingness.

The same evening he dispatched his letter to Mrs. Blake, the chemist, busy in his shop, saw Mr. Garland's carriage stop. He noticed the gentleman looked wearied and paler than ordinary.

"Good-evening, friend; I hope it is well with you."

"Very well, Sir. I am sorry you are not looking overstrong."

"To tell the truth, my rest has been disturbed. I seldom know what it is to sleep in proper hours. I shall surprise you when I say I often see the sun rise from your Dyke after a stolen night march over the Downs."

Joseph Blake looked with pitying interest at this singular man who possessed a mysterious sorrow that, if it imbittered his own life, rendered him irresistibly fascinating to others. The chemist had often speculated over Mr. Garland's age; it was as great a mystery as the rest of the surroundings; it might be thirty, it was as likely to be sixty. The Minister's servants were the only retainers in the habit of being sent to the shop from whom Mr. Blake could extract nothing relative to their master.

"I thought it very likely you studied at night, Sir; but I was quite unprepared to hear that you made such pilgrimages. However, you know a pleasure few enjoy. After the long night walk, the sunrise, from that point, must be doubly magnificent."

"You are right; it is the preparation by night for the after-joy." And for an instant a curious expression flitted over the preacher's face. Mr. Blake was not versed in this form of prescription, and attributed it to the flutter of his striped blind.

"I want you to send me some more arrowroot, as before, at your convenience."

The chemist bowed, and the preacher took up a silver-topped vinaigrette.

"Mrs. Blake is quite well, I hope? Still a truant, I suppose?" smiling, and inhaling the pungent aroma.

"I wrote my wife only this morning, and mentioned your kindness in presenting us with the tickets. We shall look forward to the Reading with eagerness. I meet my wife in town one day next week. Mrs. Blake isn't very fond of travelling by herself, but my assistant is away, and I can not spare the time."

Mr. Garland flushed. Flutter of the blind again.

"I shall be in town myself next week. Will you permit me to run down to Seaborough, and escort Mrs. Blake and your little girl home? It is dangerous journeying about unprotected, for ladies and children, in these excursion times. Nay, it won't be trespassing upon my time or my kindness; it is myself that will be indebted to you; the little exertion will prove beneficial. Is it a bargain, Mr. Blake?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; and I don't know how to thank you enough."

So by the next post Joseph Blake wrote again, in this wise:

"Mr. Garland has just been in; goes to London next week, and will be pleased to run down and see you home. Get Pet to persuade him to take her round the West End for the shops. Write me the day you propose returning."

The reply came on the 24th; it was in the child's writing, characteristic and sweet, inclosing a tiny *billet* for Mr. Garland:

"Dear Papa,—I've asked ma if I may write to you, and ma says Yes, and she's glad to get off the job. And I'm staying in this morning, instead of going a-paddling, as I meant, and I'm all alone. So you'll know I've written this all myself, won't you, dear papa? Ma has taken her knitting down to the beach, where she works in the shade of the bathing-machines, while a gentleman who's very polite, round at the hotel, and whose name on the card is 'Sir Charles Neville,' reads to ma, and seems very attentive; only you mustn't tell ma I said so, because she told me 'you needn't talk about it before your pa.' He's very kind to me, and buys sweets; but I don't like him. I like Lorry Vincent a little bit; he always lives here; we play on the beach; and I'm downright fond of his ma—but I love only you and Mr. Garland (after you, dear); and I love him dreadfully. I am so glad he is coming for us, and I couldn't help writing to say so. I do hope he won't be angry. Ma wished me to say, if agreeable to Mr. Garland, Monday or Tuesday would suit her very well. And no more at present from

"Your affectionate little girl,
"Nelly Rose Blake."

Mr. Blake smiled good-humoredly, felt pleased that his wife was being so well entertained, thought probably Mr. Garland would be amused by both the little notes, and sent them on, together with this explanation:

"Dear Sir,—Have received inclosed from my daughter, which you will make all allowance for.

"With respects, yours very faithfully,
"Joseph Blake."

He was in the dingy little study; tomes and folios on walls and floor; all the gray, grim retinue of Fathers, from which he had tried, and so unsuccessfully, to glean a little light and comfort. Old volumes like the immortal steed, bare-backed and harum-scarum; standard works of reference, like a tier of cousins three times removed; dingy maps, as displaying the dry and dusty nature of the earth; a bust or two of some cross-grained philosophers who had, seemingly, become petrified in their frowning studies; and a portrait over the mantel-piece of his predecessor; grave, firm, with little of the overflowing human sympathy this man was possessed of. He was busy writing, with the industry of a merchant's clerk, close-lined foolscap, a table of the sheets. It was currently rumored he realized a considerable income by his writings; and then arose the question, propounded by some busybody, what did he do with his money? He must be wealthy, if popularity on the page, the pulpit, and the platform spelled wealth; and yet he had never been known to make investment; so they abandoned their unsuccessful inquiry, and settled it he was amassing money on the sly. It came to him, with the rest, in a circuitous sort of way; he met it with a kind and gentle smile, and evidently did not think it of very great importance. When Mr. Blake's big blue envelope was placed upon the table beside him, he, not recognizing the handwriting, placed it a little aside, and continued his theme—some dull, uninteresting subject his facile pen was translating to color and poetry—and he went on thus with indomitable zeal and unceasing weariness at heart, until the tired eyes lifted, longing for something to light upon that might refresh and *recall;* and indifferently, almost unthinkingly, he opened the letter, read the accompanying line, the child's letter, and held the note inscribed to himself tremblingly; and with a gasping, half eagerness, half pain, another being started by this simple thing to quivering life. Some flowers fell out, wild flowers, dry by transit, yet odorous still of hedge-rows and country ways; flowers before had never seemed as sweet. This with them:

"Dear Mr. Garland,—I can not write my gladness that you are coming; I shall not sleep till then for thinking of it. But you must not bring us home directly, because there are some lovely walks I want to take you, chiefly to Sleperton Woods, which you will like wonderfully. I send a few flowers I have gathered for you, with my love and kisses.

"Your affectionate little friend,
"NELLY ROSE."

And now this grave and stately Minister does a singular thing. From a private drawer he takes a small pocket-book, from an inner pocket a letter, surely a fac-simile, flowers and love and kisses; the writing perhaps not as regular, as indicative of model school tuition, yet a sweet, impromptu little note; and now—is this the mighty elocutionist whose voice will thrill that assembly of the great hall of the Alhambra—this the preacher men and women stand in aisles for every Sabbath? Tears! Ah, well, none of the race are by. He places the notes together, and writes on. Calmly, thoughts stealing off now and again, but held in and under like the restive horses of a tandem.

On the Monday he went down to Seaborough, arrived by that evening train, and had barely alighted before two little hands took his, two lips pouted for the greeting kiss, two eyes shone lustrously a joyful welcome, and—

"How good to come! Nobody knows I'm here to meet you. Ma's walking with the company where the band is playing. Oh! I am so glad you've come! May I take that bag, Mr. Garland? Do let me carry it."

"Too heavy, pretty one. What is the hotel called? Not the best, the second best?"

"Sea View."

"Then this good fellow will take on my bag, and we will follow, for I have something for you within; and I shall be glad of a wash and brush, after which you will take me one of those pretty walks, I am sure."

Rose leaped and clapped her hands; this was her ambition.

In due time the treasures were unpacked; beautiful boxes, books, and other things dear to girlhood; and last of all a doll dressed all in the best, and this, by wish of the generous donor, the little lady was to nurse and have up to the table while he had his tea. They were all to themselves; and, although hotel accommodation, it was the most home-like tea-table the man had sat down to for —a very long time, it seemed, over that sigh.

"Well, little girl, and which walk am I to be taken this evening?"

"Oh, the best; it may rain to-morrow."

"Is that the one you called—"

"Sleperton."

"Is there not a Sleperton Manor?"

"Just the house I want to show you; it *is* a curious place. Have you then heard of it?"

"Years, years ago, I knew its owner." And the Minister had lapsed so thoughtful, little Rose delicately forbore to speak. Silently she led him toward the picturesque village. Some who passed them looked back at the tall companion of the pretty child they had seen on Seaborough beach.

"Is there no more quiet way, Rose, whereby we can escape these people and the dust? I never like a long, straight road."

"By the fields it is farther, but ever so much pleasanter."

"By the fields, then, we will go." And they set forth by way of a stile, and along a path edging the fast-ripening corn; poppies peeped forth, and blue corn-flowers played at hide-and-seek; and the little girl must make a small chaste bunch of such garner bloom and present to him, with a kiss. She did not want to stick it in his hat or button-hole, or any other vantage-point, but gave it quietly and with much good taste, arranged within the confines of one of his old letters, and therein he kept it for the time being. The field sloped to a brook where a plank and hand-rail served for a rustic bridge; forget-me-nots grew here, and reeds; dragon-flies skimmed the water, their last minuet before the sunsetting; cows were browsing in the opposite meadows; woods girdled the prospect; it was all a fair English picture of still life, and yet within hearing of the shrill neigh of the iron horse.

"Wouldn't you like to live here always—as quiet as this? I would."

"Yes, little Rose, yes—some—day—perhaps!"

"How thoughtful you are, Mr. Garland! This walk makes *you* sad; now I enjoy it to-night, *so* much."

"I only meant by my words, dear child, that man has his allotted day for work; then come the eventide and rest."

"It is evening now," said Rosa, demurely; "we will rest;" and by way of example she sat down upon the close-cropped grass. Mr. Garland stretched beside her. It was long since he had indulged in such luxurious movements. An expression of infinite tenderness overspread his face, and again that quivering of the lip that at times made the face so extremely beautiful, when within his study, and seen by no mortal eye.

"I am going to show you a picture—the last time I looked upon it, it was—an evening like this—"

"An evening of a journey?"—The face turned from the sunset as though its splendor filled him with pain.

"The evening of a journey—a long journey." He was unfolding it, with terrible care, from layer and layer of fine paper. It was a miniature, very delicately painted, of a little girl, like and yet unlike; this rendered patrician and ethereal.

A mist passed before his eyes, and for a time the sweet face looked from out a cloud.

The little girl gazed on the picture enraptured.

"How beautiful! how beautiful!"

"He restored it to his pocket, and they resumed their walk without speaking. Rose asked no question; she had seen her friend overcome by some great sorrow; it was sacred to her, and he gained of this child a mute sympathy and understanding perhaps neither man nor woman would have given.

Along the hedge-side path of a field of oats, the sway of their graceful heads reaching away to the woods, a soothing rhythm to the boding outline of the dense perspective.

"These are Sleperton Woods!" as they entered. The Minister removed his hat; it was impressive coming out of glare of the sun-flushed fields—like entering a cathedral—but so gloomy that the child started.

"I haven't been this walk for a week, and then it was in the morning. Had we better go on, Mr. Garland?"

Their eyes becoming accustomed to the dim light, they went on; he, as we know, was in the habit of taking gloomy walks. To cheer her he commenced to talk of Brighton, of his reading; how strange seemed the contrast! That Dome crowded with rank, wealth, fashion, with Society, and this still, shady retreat, where the woodpecker and the squirrel alone awoke the echoes of the vault and balcony and many-peopled area.

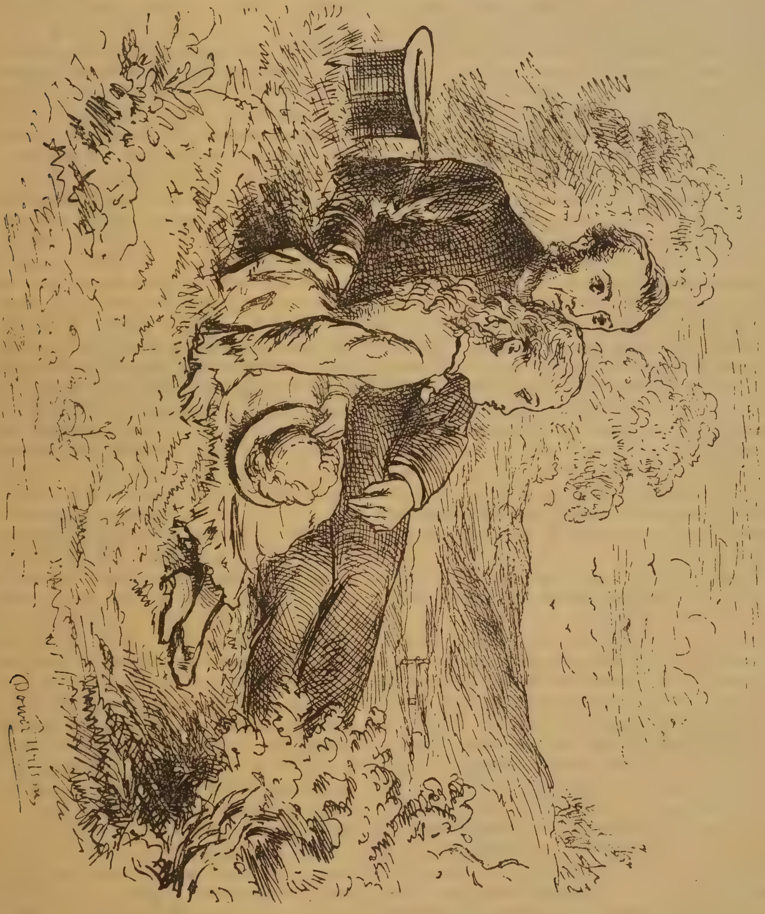
"You say you like to hear me read on the Sunday, Rose?"

"I always close my eyes, and listen with all my heart!"

He smiled at the quaint expression.

"This will be something fresh; it is a—"

Further remark was for the time intruded upon by their passing into an open—an oasis of high grass and neglected growth, where long ago, when the lord of the manor was here, trees had been felled in plenty, but since then given up to the vagrants, it lying on the right of way. Reuben Smith, the bailiff, was not overstrict in such matters; indeed, the gypsies had been noticed prowling suspiciously near to the house without molestation; a camp of this people now occupied the level.



"MR. GARLAND STRETCHED BESIDE HER."

It has been explained how Westley Garland was one with the outcast of every kind, and he could not pass the circle of wanderers around their fire without a kindly word. They looked up suspiciously. Two or three, noticing the Minister's neckcloth, removed their hats with reverence or superstition.

"What tribe is this, my friends, wishing ye well and godspeed?"

A young man among them arose upon a signal, and with strongly guttural *patois* replied for the company,

"We are Jael-Ishmael's—the stars o'ershadow and prosper his remaining years."

"I have heard of your chief, a man of wisdom: others nearer my own country have spoken of him. My name may not be unknown to your tribe; I am aware secret communication exists between your people over the whole land relative to their friends and their enemies. I am Westley Garland!"

At the name the whole company bared the head, many arose; old women, sitting remote under the trees smoking their pipes by themselves, came forward with a flowing dialect the people alone understood, but with a kind expression of countenance that lent rough charm to their swarthy faces. Sturdy men crouched alongside their asses, stretched, yawned, and joined the group; beautiful black-eyed, ruddy-cheeked boys crept up, and girls bobbed from under the tent and hooped cart: the flickering glare of the fire in the centre imparting colors to their brown skins that the old Dutch painters would have seen with enthusiasm.

"Your name is known to us," replied the young man, dignified and respectfully. The Minister scattered some silver among the children, shook hands with the young man, and when he had said a kind word to most,

"We are going to have a look at the manor, and we shall return by the road; therefore we are not likely to see you again. Good-evening."

The young man drew the Minister a little on one side; he had something to communicate.

"If you meet Jael-Ishmael, for he is yonder—an old patriarch of the silver beard—be upon guard. Our people are your friends, Jael-Ishmael is your foe!" And, as having said no more when pointing the direction of the manor than intimating the nearest approach, the young man fell quietly back into his place upon the moss, and commenced to smoke. Startled, perhaps a little annoyed, Mr. Garland walked quickly on, the child's warm hand lying tremulous as a bird in his, for its owner shared the timidity of children when too close upon the nomads. Why on earth or under the stars Jael-Ishmael should be his foe puzzled the good Minister exceedingly.

They came upon the house long after the last flushing of ruby on the stone griffins at the gates; the tangle of flowers had folded their petals, and presented an array of spears as though guarding the quiet domain. Italian terraces, part crumbled, and every where clustered thick with creepers, ivy, and wild convolvulus. A great stone basin and bronze fountain, the dolphins maned with bind-weed, the lizards leasing the stone for an amphitheatre. Nymphs, fauns, satyrs, Cupids, Parcæ, more dressed than since their creation—a green spun drapery veiling the figures, as though the garden really couldn't stand it, now left to itself. Arbors so netted over, entrance was impossible. Garden seats, mouldy, rotten, despairing, having waited so many years for somebody's patronage, and fallen down at last upon the high grass of the lawn.

The vulgar of the village said that if ever Lord Lindon did return, Old Smith, the bailiff, would catch it!

Reuben was *not* popular. He had a mill—people would not send their corn, preferring one four miles away; but out of bravado, when the wind was right, Reuben set the mill going, and ground for the poor at quarter price. If nobody sent, he would set the sails going all the same. Reuben said his lordship would never return, and it was, "Nowt use trimming up the garden for the village to stare at."

So Lorry Vincent had a delightfully romantic time of it in the big garden, and his pale mamma moved curiously among the deserted wealth, appearing in all sorts of unlikely corners, and always seeming to have one of her bright, cautious eyes over her shoulder, on the alert for any thing.

Mr. Garland had been contemplating it for some minutes in silence and with sadness. It touched a chord in his own experience, perhaps. Then his little companion said,

"What do you think of it, Sir? Is it not a curious place?"

"Not more so than one would suppose, having been unoccupied so long."

Passing round to the back, they saw a window open.

"Oh, I should like to see inside; I've heard of such beautiful pictures!"

"I do not expect we shall be trespassing very seriously if we do look through a room or two, but there is scarcely light enough for pictures."

And they entered, trod dust thicker than carpets of the loom, and stood amazed at the loftiness of the hall in which they found themselves. A great lantern with colored divisions, bearing mediæval subjects of knightly interest, was there suspended, and would light both the hall, grand staircase, and corridors above; it was incrusted with dust and woven of cobwebs. Chairs had the crest of the Lindons carved upon the backs, and a shield facing the principal entrance bore the emblazoned arms of the family. Right and left were doors, and peeping in, they saw gold and crimson velvet papering, where the dust had lodged a design never contemplated by the draughtsman; and paintings upon the walls—Eastern art chiefly—landscapes crimsoned with mighty redness, as by heat; sand tracts, glowing skies, and little water; luscious fruit and great sensuous flowers that seemed swooning in the sun; pagodas and temples of arabesque, with the palm drooping to the chalice of the lotus, as by wan thirst; and a crowd of flowers, oleander, arctotis, hyssop, magnolia, passion, tamarisk, orange, and cactus, lying with faint petals curled hot against the walls. Over the chimney-piece, so placed the twilight crept up to the grand face, was a portrait with HELEN, LADY LINDON, upon the gilt of the massive frame. It was not Westley Garland's style of beauty—too imperious and haughty a type—but he looked on it with interest, for from her came the sorrow of the Lindons; and the defiant, queenly beauty, dark it seemed as Cleopatra's, filled the chamber with a lurid light that drove back the redness of the east, and left the landscapes pale in their obtrusive glare. Or it might be the deepening of the twilight. It was becoming so shadowy in the silent house, the little girl begged to be taken away. They walked, as it were, with muffled footsteps; not an echo seemed to disturb the deadness. A flight of three steps, and the open door of a conservatory of capacious size that had sometime opened to the garden. They stood and looked through the glass an instant. Then did Westley Garland start back as though stung by an adder. Through the glass he was confronted by a face—a truly patriarchal and most venerable countenance, with long locks of silver, and a beard that trailed down to below the girdle; a vagrant costume, over which an old cloak, the garment once worn by elderly men; a palmer hat, and a long staff which the figure was too erect and commanding to lean upon. It was the revered chief of the gypsies, spoken of by name as Jael-Ishmael, and this man's foe. But why did Westley Garland start appalled if Jael-Ishmael was unknown to him? Because he recognized the eyes confronting him. Those eyes once seen by mortal were unforgotten this side of the grave; they were the eyes that wrought the trouble of the Lindons—the eyes that vanquished the original of the portrait upon which Garland had just been gazing.

Without word or indication of significance, the gypsy (in whom the reader no doubt detects that versatile genius Mr. Barnard) walked gravely from the conservatory, away by the wilderness of flowering shrubs and over the lawn, the high-tangled grass of which was swept by his ragged cloak until the heads bobbed one to another gracefully, after bending low at his passing.

As though fascinated, Westley Garland could not withdraw his gaze. Imagining him lost in one of those poetic reveries which so greatly impressed her, Rose did not attempt to break the spell; it was a ruder hand that performed this mission—a thickset, brawny man of the most unpleasing type, of the farmer-miller species, who, striding upon the scene with no gentle footsteps, desired, roughly enough, to know their business.

"No business at all, friend; rather pleasure. Visitors at the adjoining town, we have taken an idle stroll hither, and ventured to enter, knowing something by repute of the paintings. Perhaps you will tell me why you inquire so authoritatively?"

"At your pleasure. I am Reuben Smith, bailiff and overlooker to his lordship the master, now away in foreign parts, and yonder's my mill by the lock. You came in at the window?"

"At the window, Mr. Bailiff, for which accept my apology; but really the place seemed so deserted."

"And it's his lordship's pleasure it should remain so; I will therefore thank you to allow me to fasten up."

Mr. Garland acquiesced with his agreeable smile, and was about to step into the garden, when a sweet-faced lady, dressed with unassuming yet withal elegant neatness, was seen approaching, accompanied by a boy with one of those lovely faces we come upon so seldom, to whom Nelly Rose immediately ran, shaking hands very warmly, and introducing as—

"Lorry Vincent" and "Lorry's ma!" The latter bowed with considerable grace, her pleasant tongue running on, her widowed eyes looking all sorts of amiable telegrams, her little hand playing with the tassel of her garden parasol; and all the time watching with that curious cat-about-to-spring effect inseparable from this charming person.

"From Brighton! Ah, I know you by name very well; I read one of your works from the library; forgive me, it was a grand theme, grandly interpreted. And you like Brighton? I don't; noisy, slightly vulgar, every month except November. The beach simply abominable, shingle and chalk. It seemed to me Brighton was remarkable for two features, churches and hotels. *You* were not at Brighton when I formed that opinion, or I should have included a third, genius! No; I love the quieter nooks upon the sea-board, such, for instance, as we may discover in Devon."

Observing him start as with sudden pain, she went off at a tangent to something else.

"You suffer from neuralgia, now I'm sure you do! I understand the nervous sensitiveness of such a nature. Perhaps caught cold once in that very county, and the name revived painful recollections. Oh, it's a distracting complaint! Lorry, dear, leave off pulling Miss Blake's curls. A pretty child, Mr. Garland; but I wouldn't exchange *my* boy for the loveliest girl in Europe, he's so tender and thoughtful. Do you think him like me? No! More does any body else; they *can not*, Mr. Garland, he is so utterly like his papa! Bless the man, what is he following us about for?" This point-blank to Reuben, who ducked very like a poacher overtaken in the covert; but came up square and fierce, however, facing the lady, his self-possessed antagonist.

"I'm waiting to lock up, mum! Not of course to hurry you and your friends!"

"Mr. Lorry will see that all is safe, Sir," she answered, haughtily. "Would you care to look over the old place, Mr. Garland?"

"No, I thank you; I must be getting back to my hotel. I have to give a reading this week, and should regret causing disappointment through hoarseness; I am rather susceptible to cold."

"I knew it!" cried Mrs. Vincent, triumphantly, "and damp!" A curious shudder shot through the Minister's frame; Mrs. Vincent must have been a little right after all.

"You will call and see us at the Cottage any morning?" And as she gracefully tendered the invitation, carelessly poising the sunshade on the tips of her fingers, she seemed the embodiment of elegant hospitality.

"Thanks, my stay is a very short one; I may not visit Sleperton again."

"And do you return with Mr. Garland, my love?" to Rose, who replied, "I think mamma goes back with Mr. Garland, ma'am; I shall go with her."

Lorry's large eyes lifted to the Minister's face with an appealing prettiness, as to implore that his playmate might be spared to him as long as possible.

"Don't you like Lorry's mamma?" asked the little one, *ingênue*, on the way home. With characteristic honesty Mr. Garland answered, "No, Rose, I do not like Lorry's mamma." Although *why*, it might have puzzled him to tell.

Twilight time arrived, the weirdly impressive hour of the gloaming, and Garland and Rose wandered hand in hand upon the beach, far from those stragglers dotting the shore to the fore of the town. In Brighton he could not thus have roamed with the child at that solitary hour without provoking remark. This unfettered liberty was enjoyed to its fullest extent; and, seemingly overcome by some powerful emotion, he pressed the little girl to his heart, imprinting a swift kiss upon her lips; then, recovering himself immediately, and gathering all within the compass of a buttoned coat, he said, quietly, while Rose curled her hand back into his,

"You are fortunate, Rose, to have a good father to love. He is fortunate to have such a dear little girl to love him."

"I love you too." Rose said this without affectation; she meant it.

"Thanks, Rose. You can offer me nothing that would give me greater pleasure; so I am thankful, Rose, very, very thankful."

"You shall have it all; no one else shall have a bit."

"Not even Lorry?"

"Oh, that's all nonsense; just the pleasure a girl takes in playing with a handsome boy; but I never think any thing about that sort of thing; as mamma says, 'I could trust Rose to keep a boarding-school in order;' that is the reward of being innocent!" And with a mischievously demure air, little Rose looked playfully up in his face; but he was gazing with thoughtful sadness out to sea, to the west, following the jagged coastline; right away to where it was hollowed and indented into coves and bays; to where steep tors rose clad with dusky verdure, amidst which peeped forth the villas of family and domestic comfort; and where a stately hall was desolate and silent as the grave.

It is the night of the Dramatic Reading, and five minutes before the entrance of the Reader. That eccentric but magnificent interior, the Pavilion Dome, was very early, indeed long before the opening of the doors, beset by eager crowds. At moderate computation half as many people as are here assembled were unable to obtain admission. Within, the immense concert hall is transformed to a court drawing-room; it is a very garden of brilliant color, and it seems that every lady who has a pretty mantle to sport, and a tasteful head-dress to wave its plumes amidst the lace, has passed through the arabesque portals this evening.

The buzz of conversation is at its height, and criticism is in full play.

"Society does not assemble in this *distingué* order every evening, my love, so make note of any thing very pretty; but truly, although the toilets are choice, I do not see a really good-looking woman!" Thus an æsthetic and exceedingly plain mamma to the elder of five æsthetic and exceedingly plain daughters, to whom this elder Amazon acted as a sort of *aid-de-camp*. They sat all of a row, plover fashion, and gazed around with an air of pity and commiseration. They all went to Mr. Garland's church, where they sat plover in one of the front pews. They are shocked at the vanity around, especially at the blooming of so much scarlet, their own dainty shoulders being incased in white Shetland. They can not reconcile this frivolous following of a spiritual adviser with the principles of true religion; they would not be here to-night were it not for "The Mariners;" they have eschewed the world long decades since, and made a present of the old bones to Heaven—and to Westley Garland. They have a splendid situation; were among the first to trip with their guineas to Cramer's, and select it from the plan; and they have been stationed at such an outpost by the *aid-de-camp* that the great man's eyes *must* rest upon the impressive party.

A little removed from these, cynical Sir Pertinax, who has been unfortunate this summer over turf and baize, and who takes life to be a mistake and fashion a bubble, is reviewing Society with thoughtful sarcasm. The stout, somewhat florid lady next him is of opinion that he is an unpleasant person. The lady has broad bands of gold upon her wrists, and sight of the tantalizing metal acts as irritatingly upon him as scarlet upon the inevitable bull, when one is taking a short-cut across the meadows.

Two others sit apart, who dote upon music; they come to-night, never having seen the lion; and being of an opposite religion, can not attend upon Sunday where he is to be heard and seen every seventh day. They are of opinion no reading will ever approach an organ recital for soul-inspiring and sympathetic eloquence, and they sit looking at the fine organ, one of the chief glories of this chamber, and talk melodiously to their hearts' content. It really seems they know so much about music, nobody else can know any thing. A virgin, who has attuned her dulcet notes to many lyres, leans a little forward, and drinks up all their fine phrases with the eagerness of some rapt Lesbian. They are both men, and one is married, for he says, "My wife plays the violin like a seraph!" Whereat the virgin—virgins being below seraphs—collapses visibly; while he of the noble sex, to which belonged Amati, Stradivarius, Guarnerius, Guadagnini, Paer, Paganini, and other of the Cremona band, went on to remark that it was thought the seraph in question would develop into a Neruda. His companion, who was evidently not married, remarked, "If the Pavilion gardens were in my hands, I would have lanterns, as they do in the East—just a few tasteful colors glowing like fruits of the Hesperides, a revival of the Baden twilight triumphs, when Strauss set the nations spinning by Tarantula weirdism of the Lilienkranze;" which remark established him an associate of Apollo and the sacred nine of Parnassus.

Observe the grand dame to the left, fanning herself with languid elegance, which is one of the most difficult of the acquired arts. She is extremely accomplished, and loves talent in others—as do all truly accomplished people; exalts intellect, particularly when allied with eloquence; and, although saying little about it, considers Westley Garland somewhat overrated; but then she does not go with the crowd. The glint of her bracelet plays upon the pearl-gray silk, the pink-tipped plumes upon her *crêpe chapeau* flutter to the breath agitating this garden of plumes.

Yonder is a dark beauty of the Spanish school; notice the fall of deep lace, the dead gleam of gold, the embroidery of jet, the simple yet sumptuous elegance; she enjoys this grouping of fair women, for she has the true artist eye of the south; she enjoys this palace, which might have sprung from among love legends of Granada; she recalls glories of the Escurial, sweet moonlight walks in gardens, mountains stretching dim and shadowy away to old Segovia, when chanting of the monks from within the palace lent dreamy sanctity to the hour. She asks for our Pavilion chapel, thinking of that within their own palace near Madrid, with its fifty altars of crowded jewels, its eight organs of silver—all tuned together for praise—its tabernacle of gold and jewels, sixteen feet in height. She wonders when told our Prince Regent was not that way inclined, and that even this fine interior, in his day, served for stabling the first stud of Europe, and wonders still more when told that the chapel where the luxuriant Fitzherbert lies is one of remarkable humility; so she drops the subject with the graceful tact of southern natures, and enjoys our fruit and flowers, as she enjoyed them by fragrant ways in Leon, Gijon, Aragon, and Murcia, when a courtly gentleman brought her stephanotus, and murmured her name in the love-low accents of Valencia. She is here this evening, not because Society is here, but because this Protestant of the impassioned beauty and poet's eye recalls the courtly lover of the sunny port.

Remark that impulsive little body so superbly dressed. The novelists and dramatists as a rule dress their women well, but we seldom see a costume so becoming, and we attach nobility of the first water. She is alone, defiant in her richness, coldly indifferent, save to envious slant looks which cause her cheek to tingle. Royalty affronted! Not at all! She is a popular favorite of the Odéon, who here passes the recess, closes her bijou château a while, and reposes in privacy; composed, yet observant; she will not gather much from our barbarians—as she terms these showy folk—an inkling of eccentricity, a tint or two of coarseness to be utilized by her consummate talent; a glimpse of elegant vulgarity she will color into a study all Paris will devour; a display of robing which may cause her to shudder slightly, but will bear transposition into a style that may set the fashion for many an evening to come.

Beside her sits a plain lady descended from many earls; she is rising like Amphitrite from billows of semi-pellucid gros grain of a rich onyx and *eau de Nil* blending, whereon *point d'Alençon* foams from bosom to skirt; the actress is pleased to look down the surf and the waves, and to pronounce the costume—*exécrable!* The lady is unconscious if male or female be beside her.

A duchess and party attract notice, simply for their severe neatness; precise and quiet, bound without gilt edging, in neutral tints. They might be taken for a comfortable family out of the wilds; but be not deceived by appearances; these people could lay this Alhambra with solid plates of gold, and never feel the loss. Observe them to-morrow—not on the King's Road or any vain drive or promenade, but in the unfrequented paths beyond the township, where quiet villages nestle midst clefts of the downland, and where the whirl of wheels is rare. It is a mulberry chariot, quite of the old school, and, like the family vault, massive to annihilation; of course, sight of the family is impossible when imbedded down among the leather and velvet cushions; but sometimes they sit bolt-upright, wonderfully erect for their ages, especially when a man is seen beating a donkey, or a dog running with its tongue out. At such times they look as stern as those placid faces can look, occasionally stop the coachman and inquire into it; but they are careful not to give any thing away, being of opinion that it encourages idleness, and devoting their surplus donations to drinking fountains, cats' hospitals, and similar philanthropic institutions.

The family in mourning are the cream *par excellence* of Norman descent; they adhere to Brighton or Hastings for ancient family associations, dating from William of conquering fame. They are in costly sable, and intend wearing it beyond the complimentary term, in consequence of its being so becoming. They do not mourn after the received school, experiencing magnificent consciousness of the honor conferred upon heaven by "our representative."

The dark man with the curly hair is considered very fascinating; *attaché*, poet, traveller, aristocratic Bohemian; he has lived every where, chiefly in the East; says this Pavilion is a pill-box to the Cotsea Bhang on the Jumna, with its wilderness of aromatic flowers, and its fountains in the midst of groves of mango, lime, orange, guava, tamarind, and pomegranate: talks much of Ramisseram, and has drawings of Constantia, the quaint Pavilion of Hindostan, with its stucco fret-work and Chinese barbarism, and retinue of scarlet lions; its hideous crowding of Gothic towers and Grecian pilasters, Mussulman brazen pyramids, Arab pinnacles, Chinese pagodas, Hindoo columns, and all the pageant of the eccentric in architecture. He rattles on with his palace talk, comparing our Regent to Shah Jehan, who built him a dream in Delhi, but who outshone our Prince by reason of his greater magnificence, his gardens costing one million sterling. Therein flourished Asia's choicest flowers; the marble walls were laid with plates of silver; galleries of lattice-work blazed with emeralds and rubies, so disposed as to present the appearance of clusters of grapes in different stages of growth. He wears a superb specimen of the *Gloire de Dijon*, and he will tell you he brought the tree from those gardens; of course nobody believes it, but they take his roses all the same, for the rose from any other garden smells as sweet.

"I don't see a really stylish figure, do you, dear? If not quite as advanced as the New York blondes whom Mora and Sarony photograph so charmingly, we do see style in Brighton. But there, my love—look at that girl, a duke's daughter we used to visit, but I really couldn't tolerate that absence of style any longer! Heigho! If she does not alter that figure, wherever she will be put when she gets to heaven is more than I can say!" Thus chatters old Lady Angular, whose absence of symmetry amounts to severity, and whose taste is considered mildly Moorish.

"One scarcely likes to sit here in the full blaze of that chandelier; I remember the time when gallantry held girls sacred, and the eyes of the other sex drooped before youth and innocence." Thus the Hon. Deborah, a venerable spinster, to a bosom-friend, another venerable spinster, and both of this parish: both also of Society.

There is a long man with a thin face, the longest man with the thinnest face in the room; he crosses over to the man from India; they are club-mates, have each written, each sketched; and kneeling upon the fauteuil, the thin-faced man tries to outtalk the other upon Society in Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Burmah, and that overrun tomb-and-temple tract stretching from the Ganges to the heart of Punjab. The thin man invites the other to his bungalow, as he calls his pretty box set between hills, where in the hall a tiger of his shooting glares upon you, with high grass peering up behind the furniture from pots set upon the Indian matting. His rooms are plentiful with gorgeous screens of plumage his unerring shot robbed from tropic forests. He has left behind—at the seats from which he comes to talk a while with his friend—a dark-skinned, pensive girl, an orphan, the only child of a scholarly European long settled in the East. She is very sensitive, not at all at home by this machine-bordered Ægean; disliking the cliff with its long train of coolly criticising school-girls, who make fun of her brunette beauty and rich coloring of dress, and sighing for the Piazza descending to the Hooghly, where the little children of Garden-rich sing in the low light of evening, among the white and purple cactus bloom. The walks and drives about Brighton are so different to the wealth of verdure amidst which her girlhood sported; the poppies growing in the corn fields recall the vast sweeps of scarlet plantation that belted the hills, where they sketched beneath the banyan groves; the blue bloom of this sea brings back rich waving fields of indigo, beside which she wandered, searching for lilies on the Ganges bank; and this Pavilion, with its minarets and domes, causes old Benares to rise before her, the Mecca and the Rome of Hindoo-land. Suddenly there is a hush in the conversation. It betokens an arrival of more than ordinary interest: not Royalty—Royalty does not go to Brighton—yet evidently a grandee, compared with whom these pale their lustre. Ebenezer Wriggle insinuates himself among the rows of seats, Josiah Bubb comes bustling up, and Mr. Lurch marches pompously as though about to take the chair. As a matter of accuracy, somebody has to be turned out of the chair, for an audacious young man, either fraudulently or unintentionally, has placed himself in the seat of error; and all the Tonic Ale and Pickles, Sauce and Buckram, rise indignantly as the three great municipal officers advance to clear the way; and round the circle, in the wake of these, a maid of agile movement follows, bearing upon her arm a shawl gorgeous with gold and color. Immediately behind the damsel comes a gentleman with a white cravat, bearing a cushion of considerable size, which he adjusts with much care in one of the chairs. Then appears a gentleman in plain evening dress, preceding and ushering to her seat perhaps the most queenly woman who has ever been thus attended. Of course Society is too well bred to stare, but it does the next best thing—looks on the slant. And a very erect and haughty appearance is presented of a graceful and beautiful woman, but beneath whose beauty is an expression of sadness that must touch any heart, were it not for the cold and repelling hauteur. Society is too taken up with observation of the lady to notice her companion with more than the most cursory of glances. It is an elderly gentleman of shriveled appearance, sallow, with thin, light locks, and a little fringing of whisker seemingly hesitative which color to take to, drab or white. Most of those assembled know her to be Lady Helen Darrel, and the gentleman, vaguely alluded to as "His Lordship," is popularly supposed to be her ladyship's father. These seated, that excitement is quelled, and people settle down to watch the platform for the Reader's appearance. The thin-faced, long-bodied man from India says *Au revoir* to the curly-headed man from the same quarter, both, of course, looking with vivid interest at the last-named group, one of them feeling sure he has seen the old man somewhere in the jungle, while the other distinctly remembers dancing with "that superb creature" in Calcutta.

A gentleman walks up to the platform, ascends the short steps, and stands before the people, and the outer circle applauds vociferously, but ceases abruptly when it is discovered to be merely the individual with the water bottle. Having placed this to his liking, and raised the reading-stand to the height he deems appropriate, he retires. A pause.

Then the Rev. Westley Garland walks upon the platform, and with a gentle inclination of the head, in response to the cordial welcome which echoes round the Dome with spontaneous heartiness, he takes his place at the reading-desk, opening a black-covered manuscript book with intentional slowness, to allow the noise to abate.

Some notice that his regard for applause is very slight, so slight they fancy he does not hear it, or is lost in thought. Others remark his attitude to be systematic and regular, and pronounce Garland a very business-like fellow indeed, very! Not a few fall into quiet side studies of the face, chisel the aristocratic profile upon memory, cut a portrait cameo of a kingly type, and from the picture derive many after-musings. Those who are partial to tracing the poetry to be found in a few rare faces, revel over the soul stamped upon these aquiline features. Some few fancy they have met him somewhere, before this Brighton era, in quiet select circles far beyond the pale of Society: they fancy so, but can't remember where. One or two are almost sure he was at the University when they were there; they are not quite certain, but seem to recollect the face, although so aged and altered; and they go humming and drumming, "Garland!" "Garland!" and get nothing out of the name, and so give it up, particularly when he begins to read. Every thing in the hall is given up then; there is no resisting the spell of that wonderful voice, and the most idle chatterer there desists, to listen.

Richly modulated; yet the secret of success was more the result of feeling than of art, all musical, sonorous, sweet, or sympathetic; the voice thrilled or moved, and at times compelled the heart to follow it; it was no ear-melody this, but language sinking deep into the soul; all the cunning of master eloquence never imparted graver charm (on no occasion was he ever known to interpret comedy); tuneful, harmonious, and, above all, unutterably tender: showing that there may be words more exquisite than songs, and music more lovely than the throb of harps.

People had speculated and wondered upon the probable subject of Mr. Garland's selection. Would he read something appropriate to the mariners? would he please with some descriptive picturesque poetry of the wild sea-girt life, or move them to tears over some idyl of homes left husbandless and fatherless, while brave men confronted furious legions of billows? or would it be some gentle love-note, some sweet rhapsody of cerulean days, or perchance a poem of the country, dog-roses and bloom of the May, honeysuckle and odorous limes?

No, it is a simple chronicle, so simple it seems strange these ultra-fastidious people can be found to sit so patiently; nay, they are breathless, absorbed, spell-bound. Merely the story of a sailor, bluff and honest and good-looking, who loves a lass and longs for her, but is too poor to wed, and waiteth issue of the fisheries, she all the time beloved by another who would do this one an injury. At last their little savings are inducement to unite, and both are happy, and the sun beats broad upon their sea. But that other, by circuitous ways, brings trouble, and their store exhausted by treacherous waves that rend the net and crash the bark, they are brought to sorry straits and get in debt, and from bad to worse, when the crisis comes, and the fisher disappears—drowned, say the wise, which the foolish accept—and the home stands empty with poorer hearts, a mother and child, and a wolf prowling round the walls.

Like a clarion note the reader's voice rang with the divine injunction: "Help the poor! wherever met, wherever found, help the poor! Go forth to succor those bereft of their protector, those beset with peril, encircled by enemies; help the defenseless! There are mothers and children abroad, shelterless under the wide sky, no glimpse of hope any where save in each other's love. Rescue them, restore those homes, replace those friends; there are the helpless hungering for a word of kindness, drooping for need of care—search for them, seek near, seek far; they are pining for your help!" And people thought he had done well for the mariners, this impassioned speaker, so unceremoniously breaking the thread of his theme to advocate this strong sympathy with the oppressed. Then he resumed his plaintive story, and his audience followed its innocent dramatism, point to point of the quiet yet intense piece of weaving, and the power of the chronicle lived in those fixed looks, composed attitudes, straining forward, hand up to the ear of the aged, silent attention of the young. The spectacle of that audience was no uninteresting study, the mass of people hanging upon one man's utterance, that intellectual and refined speaker exerting his every energy to awaken kindly feeling and sympathy in the mixed assembly present.

Once or twice he lifted his eyes; to rest once—when dwelling with infinite pathos upon the child of the story—upon his little friend Rose. At another time, upon the upturned face, like a mask of marble, of Lady Helen. He caught the eyes, became entangled therewith, and put them from him as things that burned.

The Reading was divided into three sections, the second division being poetic; each division was complete in itself, each extending to between half and three-quarters of an hour. He was not niggardly with his genius when dispensing for a charitable purpose. It was a memorable evening, remembered by more than the mariners whom he had befriended.

CHAPTER XIV.

SKIRMISHING.

"METEORS about, I think!" and Mr. Barnard pointed to the sky, a flash of light suddenly attracting attention. "If you will permit me, I'll take a turn upon the lawn? This phenomenon, like the Aurora Borealis, is very interesting."

"By all means," said St. Aubyn, looking anxiously in the direction of the weather-glass. "I fear we shall have a storm to-night."

He passed out, bare-headed, and, as though conscious of the direction, walked swiftly to that spot where the shrubs edged the cliff. He heard a footstep to the right, and crouching like a beast of prey, Mrs. Brandon passed him close, muffled and stealthy; there was a strong scent of turpentine, spirits of wine, oil, and other inflammable substances upon her trail, and the man in ambush smiled grimly, and, when she had passed, leaned and looked down. There, far below, a torch, of impromptu make, still guttered and flickered fitfully upon the cliff where it had fallen, sufficient, however, to reveal the clinging figure of a man, who, completely overhanging the water, gesticulated and signaled for assistance. A yacht was lying off almost within speaking distance, the moonlight broad on its white sails and deck, where a man outstretched at ease was smoking and looking at the stars; from this it was evident the man in extremity had not been seen, nor the torch which Mrs. Brandon had hurled from the height as a beacon. Save for this flickering light, all the steep was clothed in darkness, while the yawning cavern at foot, where never man had entered but by boat, was hidden under the surf. Calmly, as preparing for his couch, Noel Barnard removed his faultless broadcloth and stood as faultless in his undress. The torch had lodged midway between the man and the summit; it was not half consumed; did that lonely star-gazer but turn his head an inch in the direction of the cliff, the man must be seen, would be rescued; it was Noel Barnard's purpose to prevent this. It was perilous to a suicidal degree; but that weighed last with the daring schemer. He sat upon the brink, and, lowering one of those lithe sinewy hands, tested the undergrowth; it stood a vigorous pull. Then he tried the surface with his heels for a ledge or prominence; the face was uneven, rough, and jagged; he turned round and commenced the difficult process of descent, holding hard to the growth or buttress where the rock clove the outline, planting his feet where practicable to save weight; so, lower, lower, beat of the waves sounding more shrill every yard he descended, the strong wind breasting the height as though it would dislodge him like thistle-down, and causing the flambeau to flare with a redder, wider light. Near this the lowermost man (who could toil no lower, but must drop, failing his hold, into the seething caldron) was swinging like some ghastly pendant to a gibbet; and away in the distance was the yacht, light as some fairy bark, its owner dreamily wreathing the stars in clouds. Nearer the torch, it seemed but a hand's breadth, and already the height above seemed a journey to be done by flight alone; now by accident dislodging pieces of the stone or earth, which fall and alarm the victim, who, looking up, sees the dread form of his enemy gaining upon him and banishing his only hope of rescue, and, drawing breath, he shouts again, and this time with wild despair; but before the echo of that harrowing cry can have travelled to hearing of those on board of the vessel, the torch has been seized and is quenched. And then commences the more arduous part of Noel Barnard's mission; he does not intend to return yet, for his work is but half accomplished. He has to descend yet farther; he has determined to complete both deed and doom; and the man below, although he can not see that form, stealing unerring as a deadly red-skin on the trail, yet feels it is approaching, and nerves himself for the death-tussle, when one or other, or perchance both, must go down to the depths. But it is a long time approaching, or it seems so, in that time of terrible suspense; only the falling messengers give awful warning. At last the pursuer has turned round, and like an immense lizard advances head-first; and in the darkness the white reptile hand glides down and loosens the other's grasp, and uproots the last hold to which in his agony he now clings with both hands. There is a crash, the growth gives way, man, plant, earth, stone, falling like lead; the lizard pausing to rest upon his ledge, and turning with sardonic relish the whole morsel under his tongue. Shortly, he upon deck coming down from his dreams, stretching his legs, awakens his skipper, and pacing the deck, takes his promised view of her home by moonlight; hoping, yet scarcely daring to hope, for a glimpse of the lovely form at one of the chamber windows, and sees something that causes him to snatch up the glass and again inspect the frontage with the closest attention at command. There, at an upper window, standing between the darkness and the brilliancy of the apartment, is a figure which he imagines to be hers. As it moves he remarks the same dress he had seen in the evening, and a lace scarf thrown over the head falls above the shoulders; she notices the movement with the glass, and kisses her hand to him thrice, then holds her arms forth appealingly, as though imploring release, lifting them heavenward, and in the direction of himself, and clasping them despairingly upon her bosom. A touching and effective tableau, and well done; at least such was the verdict of Mr. Barnard, who, walking across the lawn, cool as though he had but just left the supper-room, re-entered, brushing knees and elbows with the finest of lawn handkerchiefs, and looking with mild reproach at Williams:

"Why not have warned me, friend, I should catch my toes? So you play croquet?" playfully, to Lena. "And a charming exercise; very pretty, very! Did you ever play the game by moonlight?"

Soon afterward Mrs. Brandon enters quietly, and resumes the jelly with frank composure.

"Head better, I trust, ma'am?" Mrs. Brandon bows gracefully to the visitor. The head is a little better, and she thanks him for his kind sympathy.

"But the meteor!" says St. Aubyn, mischievously. "Let us see this fallen star, Mr. Barnard."

That gentleman removes from a coat-tail pocket, with the gravity of a geological lecturer in Jermyn Street, a flint nearly as large as a ploughshare, and sedately quotes:

"I have no doubt, my dear Sir, but that this is the subject of our speculation. It is well known that flint forms a very rare constituent of the fireball proper, which mainly consists of iron, nickel, and other minerals; but I take this to be an exceptional case. Just handle this, Mrs. Brandon; you will do me the favor of agreeing it is altogether exceptional. I look upon this as a most remarkable aerolite; this night will be long remembered. When I discovered it, the thing was hot, and I burned my fingers, a common fate in the pursuit of science."

"I really know so little of the sciences of geology or mineralogy; botany is more in our way, is it not, my dear Miss Lena?" and with a very charming smile, the lady returned the specimen, with many thanks.

Meanwhile, out at sea, the young yachtsman was puzzling his handsome, idle head over the curious action of the young lady in whom he experienced so warm an interest. After twisting it about, he construed a sign out of it: this lovely and unfortunate girl was unhappy, miserably imprisoned by a stern, unnatural sire, whose brain was half turned by foreign suns and book-reading. She had seen him pass at sunset-time; had expected his return; had joyfully beheld the yacht again where it crossed the moon-line; had appealed to him with a sublime hope. Oh yes! He saw it all; *he* was appointed the knightly champion for her deliverance; he accepted his destiny; he breathed a prayer.

"Brown, the whiskey!"

The skipper, refreshed by his nap, produced the keg with alacrity, remarking upon the chilly moisture of the air, that went straight to the bones subject to rheumatism. This little matter Mr. Arden dismissed with his accustomed liberality; he was generosity from crown to sole. Buttoning the rough pilot coat upon his chest, he walked the deck with briskness, muttering to himself about a select company of historic personages who had succored damsels of high degree, stowed away in dragon-guarded castles, with a hydra-headed ogre as chief of the firm. Whereon skipper Brown, finding himself not wanted, or not admitted to this new fancy of his young master's, peered through the glass into the shady groves, and presently espied something clambering or trying to clamber up the wave-broken rock at the entrance of the cave that, black and forbidding, formed a hideous arch consecrated to night.

"Yer pardon, Mr. William; what be that a-steering yonder?"

Arden took the glass, drew himself leisurely forth from his reverie, and looked. There was so much moonlight it became difficult at first to distinguish. A clear bright night, clear as when the frost bites and all the land is bound, while the sea drinks up the snow-flakes, or casts them indifferently from her, fringed with her foam. A veil of silver seemed spread dim and ghost-like, stretching leagues, torn in places where the wind had caught it, splashed and sprinkled, and bestrewn with a spray of diamonds.

"List, Mr. William; 'tis a shout!"

"It's a man! How the deuce did he come there? Overtaken by the tide, probably."

"You give orders for picking him up, I suppose, Sir?" and the skipper paused anxiously.

CHAPTER XV.

RECOUNTS THE ADVENTURES OF "WALTER GORDON."

With slow and toiling footsteps Walter Gordon entered the pretty village, long after dusk had robbed the trees of color and shrouded the old church tower in gray perspective.

Little children, peeping forth before going off to bed, saw the dragging progress along the village street, and murmuring, "A tramp!" went away to dream of its white face. A wagoner stood in the doorway of the ale-house, and just looked up from his pipe; lights were behind the red curtain, and the window shone cheerfully forth from the pale background. The forge was closed; the smith, lying upon the grass-plot of his garden, played with his boy; bits of iron and an array of horseshoes stuck in the grass, emulating pastime the child had seen through the Rectory palings.

The village school-house looms like some Gothic toy; a light at the upper window betokens the retiring to rest of the estimable mistress. Beyond this the Rectory stands back in its shadowy grounds.

There are diverging lines of cottages; several better-class dwellings, with five windows and a door, and a formal plot of pelargoniums and geraniums, with box or gentian borders. One more ambitious has a wooden sailor and a miniature cannon, which the youngsters regard with becoming awe.

There is a scattering of still superior dwellings, of the "contract" villa species. These are tenanted by Seaborough traders, and afford an agreeable change, with salubrious addition. And there are outlying farms, rural and hospitable, with snowy sheets bleached on the hedge-rows, and wide old chimney-pieces, below which one may sit to count the stars.

And there is a large old place standing back from the village green. It is surrounded by trees, and has a great garden track to the front and to the rear, where all seems going to weed and seed. This is Sleperton Manor, and Walter leans wearily against its quaint approach.

The old house of which the aged countryman had told him! And the child—for he seems little more—gazes upon the massive frontage with that languid interest a weary wanderer takes in the association-haunted piles of forgotten ways.

Beyond this is a charming cottage, low-pitched, pine-built, fragrant through summer and winter seasons: picturesque ever, and from all sides an artist's study. This is The Cottage, Mrs. Vincent's retreat—a bijou mixture of art and luxury.

Lorry Vincent stands by the gate while Walter passes, and their eyes meet.

"Are you looking for some house? Can I help you?"

And the boy with the lovely face leans forward over the gate, with the kindest and most winning smile imaginable.

"Thank you. Can you tell me of any house where I can obtain shelter for the night?"

"I do not know of any apartments to let. Just now, while the season lasts, is the busy time at Seaborough. In winter there are plenty almost at your own price. I dare say you have walked from the town, and are tired?"

"I am very tired. I have not been well of late."

"I do feel for you. It is so bad to be a stranger in a place, and unwell!"

Walter thrilled to the sympathy; his eyes drooped before the handsome orbs bent so admiringly, yet all pityingly, upon the face he felt to be very worn and pale.

"Your words are like music; it is long since I heard kind voices."

"Poor fellow! What shall I do to assist you? Where can you go? But come in and sit down to rest. I am sure mamma will not mind. She is listening to the band now."

Saying which, the boy unlatches the gate and holds it open for the stranger. Walter gratefully accepts the proffered rest, and together they enter the cottage.

A fair-faced, rather delicate youth, this Walter, with a profusion of blonde curls short to the head; a slight, symmetrical figure; a small white hand, which of itself would bespeak his gentle breeding; a timid, shrinking manner, indicative of extreme sensitiveness; and a tone of voice which, while sweet, was sad.

The gentleness which won upon the old man earlier in the evening now wooes Lorry Vincent to a friendship strong and true.

With infinite tenderness he removes the cap from those clustering curls, and brings a ewer and towel. A boy is so thoughtful, so ready, so considerate! Say—oh! ye mothers with one such—is this not so? Are not theirs the lissom fingers to perform those acts of loving service so dear to you, and of which you think long after in the still small hours? Are not theirs the quieter footsteps when your head throbs painfully, and all the world seems jarring on your nerves? And theirs the lowered voices, until the very air seems quivering with their sympathy?

They are not all alike, but some are exquisite, and of this order was Lorry Vincent.

The gratitude welling up in the clear, eloquent eyes of the other may move him, for he hurries to bring wine and biscuits for this tired wayfarer so little older than himself. Then he sits down and looks with troubled interest at the trembling one. It is long since kindness has touched this heart, while all who have encountered it have pierced, bruised, and wounded it, after the manner of the world!

Their acquaintance improves very rapidly. Lorry is pleased. With the exception of Harry Abbott's son, a charming boy picked out for his particular friend, he knows of none to whom he would give the full treasure of the first-fruits of his loving friendship. He has never met with any one like this—so quiet and gentle. He can not tell why, but the voice thrills him; and those eyes, timorous as the eyes of some startled fawn, drooping before the strong hazel of his own, cause his cheeks to tingle with the first pleasurable sensation of his life.

"Tell me, who are you?" he murmured, softly.

"One without a friend!" answered the other, while the eyes filled with tears and coursed down the delicate skin.

"But *who* are you? Tell me."

"I am known as 'Walter Gordon;' but I believe even my name, like all else about me, is uncertain and doubtful. I am a nobody; yet my whole soul, my every hope, point to high and lofty aims. I have been unfortunate. The guardian who had care of my infancy and youth betrayed every trust reposed in her, placing me out cheap with common work-people, and devoting the money allotted her for my maintenance to other uses. The humble home which thus became my portion was in time broken up, and I was cast a helpless waif upon the world."

"How sad! I have read of such cases in books. And you have really gone through all this?" looking with renewed interest at the refined young face.

"All, and more. For, listen—the remainder is soon told. I was taken in hand by a hard, stern woman, who placed me at a small school; I suppose to be out of her way while at work, her ostensible business being the making of artificial flowers. But she was connected in some way (as dresser, I believe) with one of the London theatres. In time—I was then ten years of age—I was compelled to join others at the theatre, where I suppose my face, happening unfortunately to be passable in my looks, made me worthy of a conspicuous position, and I was always placed foremost in the groupings. This bore fruit, for another manager bid money for my services to play a page in his burlesques."

"Yes," said Lorry Vincent, thoughtfully, "you are very good-looking."

And standing over Walter, he patted the curly fleece with affectionate solicitude.

"This resulted, when I was thirteen, in my being apprenticed for five years to a large travelling circus company. The new life was a hard one. Some of the men were kind to me, others unfeeling and cruel; and one was very brutal, and used to beat me."

Master Vincent shrugged his shoulders, and took the hand of his friend.

"Sometimes gentlemen used to come behind the curtain, and not always for the best of purposes. One of these befriended me, interposing between that cruel man and myself. He spoke so kindly to me, I loved him from then. I met him after the performance, when it was dark and nobody saw us, and he gave me a sovereign to get myself little things he knew I needed. He said, 'If ever you are in trouble, and want a friend, come to me,' and he gave me his card. I have never forgotten him, although I doubt not he has long since forgotten me; and I have come to try and find him here, and see if he will be again my friend. The work of the circus was too much for my strength. Willing enough, I could not do more than nature permitted; no allowance was made, and I was beaten with severity. I could bear no more, and left them; but fatigue and privation, following upon my other hardships, brought on illness, from which I am but now recovering. And I owe much to the Christian woman who took me in, ministered to me, nursed me, nourished me, and gave me the means of reaching London."

"There are not many of that sort about, I imagine."

"This was one of the Society of Friends, which may account for her broad charity and goodness. I went to London, to the gentleman's house, and to my disappointment learned he was down here for a month. I had not sufficient money to bring me here; besides, how did I know my errand would prove successful? But I had *faith*, without which we should pass wretched lives indeed; and I hoped on, that strong staff to lean upon. I don't think him a good man, but—he was kind to me; and those who, like him and that dear lady, and yourself, have been kind to me, I can never forget."

Master Vincent blushed and his eyes drooped—compliment was new to him. True, Nelly Rose, his sometime sweetheart, had whispered, "Do you know, I think you are so beautiful!" To which he had replied, "For that no credit is due to me, my dear. I have a beautiful mamma!" And it had gone in at one ear and out at the other; but this, said so sincerely and with such evident gratitude, touched the boy, and he looked down and made no reply.

"There was nothing I could do but partly enlist the housekeeper's good-will. I told her sufficient to lead her to advance me a few shillings; and now that I am here, my object is to obtain some kind of shelter for the time being—until he will take me into his service, or procure me some situation."

"Nay, do not trouble about turning out tonight; we have vacant rooms; and if that's all, you shall sleep with me."

The blush that dyed the other's cheek lent tenfold charm to the delicate prettiness.

"Before we go on any further, let me explain something. It is a secret; but you will keep it for me; it is for my safety's sake. I am so fearful of being taken again by those circus people, who, I suppose, can claim my services for the time I was apprenticed."

"I don't know much about it, but I suppose they can. Tell me your secret. I will keep it."

"Thanks, Sir; I am sure I may rely upon your promise. *I am a girl.* I took this dress, which, so often playing page, well fitted me, the better to escape discovery and insult; I left in its place my few poor savings; I would retain the dress, if possible, for I feel safe in it."

Master Vincent had edged a little away during the *naïve* revelation, feeling any thing but safe himself.

"Well, you do make a good boy," he said, looking over the piece of art blushing there before him, "and I think you will escape detection for some long time to come; but how bold of you!"

"The suffering I went through made any thing better than returning to that life. I am afraid the boldness, as you call it, partakes more of that desperate struggle for preservation we are to believe is the first law."

"How you talk! You might have been to college."

"My college has been a hard one, in which there were more blows than books, and more kicks than half-pence!"

"How old are you?"

"Not fifteen yet, and *so* tired of it all." And with a sad smile that, with the mournful voice, was inexpressibly pathetic, the unfortunate child leaned her head back upon Lorry's shoulder and burst into tears.

"Come, come, do not cry; I will be your friend, your brother; you want a nice big brother like me to fight your battles; and I *can* fight for a cause: you should see me tackle Reuben Smith about the manor."

"Can you tell me how to act?"

"Well, I wouldn't depend too much upon this gentleman; look to your own efforts more. By-the-way, what is his name?"

"Sir Charles Neville!" Master Vincent started. "Do you know him?"

"Mamma does; he is always flirting with somebody or other. For goodness' sake keep out of his way; I am quite sure he will never be any good to you. I can't bear the man."

"Do you know of any situation I could take?"

"Well, after what you have told me, it is a curious thing to recommend. There is the large school near to the sea—a young gentlemen's school; they are in want of a page-boy there; I heard our servant say so; but then, you know, it's a hazardous sort of place for you."

"I don't mind that, if I can only get it. Is there any other?"

"Major Howard wants a 'tiger;' but then Sir Charles visits there."

"Is there no other?"

"Mr. Simcox, the curator of Seaborough Museum, wants a boy to give out books from the Free Library. What sort of boy are you at running up a ladder?"

Lorry was himself again, merrily, wickedly mischievous. His companion, smiling faintly, answered,

"Not very quick, I'm afraid."

"Well, then, there's my friend Harry's papa; I dare say he would take you to learn the farming. He is so good, he is; I am quite sure, could he hear the circumstances of your case, he would dispense with the premium; but what would be the good of it all? You couldn't do that work; it would be too heavy for you; and I don't know that my friend Harry Abbott would not find it out in time; and I don't think *I* should like you always being with Harry, because I do take just a little interest in you, you know."

This was a very pretty scene, could any one have peeped in thereon, and a fruitful essay might have been read of this young acquaintance.

Lorry walked to the window. The shades had deepened; the evening star shone like some gleaming gem; over the yellow-blossomed pastures the note of a nightingale quavered with silver clearness; up from the sea stole its fragrant night-bloom, blending with the incense of a hundred gardens; some mother in the village was lulling her little one to rest with a low vesper of the nursery; from the old church just by rolled the faint echo of a hymn the organist was practicing for his next Sabbath's praise; a soft pastoral hush pervaded the scene, and it was very sweet to this child of many wanderings.

"How late mamma is! I wish she would come in;" and the boy returned to his new friend's side.

"It is very happy to have a dear mother, to look for her coming, and to hang upon those moments when in her company. I have had no mother's love to brighten my dreary life."

"Have you no recollection of either of your parents?"

"Oh yes; of both. Dim as a dream comes back a certain dreadful night when I was taken up hurriedly from my cot, carried in my mother's arms to a carriage, and driven off with great speed. I remember it so distinctly because my mother had always awed me by her studied grace of movement and deliberate action. To me she had ever been too full of majesty for love to dare to venture near; therefore that precipitate flight created an impression all these after-years have not served to erase."

"How strange! I shouldn't wonder if you belong to some noble family; it often happens thus, at least in the novels and story-books I get from the library."

"Walter Gordon" smiled with grave sorrow, and looking out far into the gloaming, said,

"I am afraid there was as little nobility as loyalty about it. I would give any thing to know the story of my birth. Often do I recall my father's face, so poet-like and handsome was it. I never read of King Solomon but my father comes to mind. I believe he was wise; I know he was wealthy, for our home with its great chambers was like the country dwelling of a monarch, so sumptuous, so stately, so ancient. I can recall the carved mantel-pieces I used to stand upon a stool and try to reach; and the stained window on the landing of the oak stairs, through which I watched that star, first one color and then another; and the dusky library, with bronze busts of the philosophers; and the conservatory opening from the dining-room, over the chimney-piece of which apartment I can just see through the haze of years a splendid portrait of my mother."

Gradually, step by step, during this revival of her childish memories, Lorry's face had been slowly turning ghastly. With open mouth and staring eyes he followed the narration, rising inch by inch from the couch, and he now laid a hand upon "Walter Gordon's" arm with an excited and appealing gesture.

"That will do; don't say any more. You must be going; mamma must not find you here, and she will be home almost directly."

The other looked astonished at this sudden change, and arose tremblingly, wondering what new trouble was in store.

"It is not safe for you to remain—and hark! That is the garden latch; come this way, quick!" He led the frightened child out by the back offices, and then, pointing over in the direction of the deserted manor, entreated her to run there, pressing a small key into the hand he shook with loving heartiness.

"I will come to you some time to-night. Do not fear; nothing will harm you. You will find matches and a lantern upon the inlaid table as you enter at the small door on the west side. Good-by, my dear; let me give you one kiss—there! God bless you!"

"Lorry! Lorry dear!" rang a sweet voice, while Mrs. Vincent entered at the front-door. "Where are you, my child? I thought you would have come to meet me; but never mind; I've a gallant cavalier. Come in, Sir Charles, now do!"

"Aw, very good of you, I'm sure; but I promised faithfully to get back to the hotel. Still, I don't mind a minute or two. Where's the boy? Ah! how do, Sir? Haven't seen you on the parade this evening."

"I have been better engaged, Sir Charles."

"Bless my soul, that's good, too! Better engaged than listening to the town subscription band, and watching Society in this charming resort? Now I do like that; it's devilish good, young Sir, and you've scored one." And the baronet indulged himself in a little affected laugh, as he always did when any thing tickled him.

"Do you know, Anna, that boy will grow up conceited, if you don't check him; it's a-aw, a horrid vice is conceit!" drawling which morality, the young aristocrat stroked his fawn mustache with infinite daintiness. Sir Charles presumed upon long and intimate acquaintance with the fascinating widow, and always addressed her by her Christian name when alone. There were not wanting those who prophesied that this lady, whom they affectionately designated "the elegant schemer," would eventually develop by natural transition into the future Lady Neville. But then it was well known the baronet was a dreadful flirt, and nobody's chance was certain; and this caused great concern among those who took a solicitous interest in Mrs. Vincent and her affairs.

Master Vincent had left the room; he did not enjoy the society of this brainless fop, and he was angry and jealous of his friendship with his idolized mother, whom, with all her graces and cleverness, Lorry sometimes thought very foolish, and, he was fain to admit to himself with sorrow, a little designing. And Anna Vincent could be more than this: hence his hurried concealment of "Walter Gordon."

Fear winged the footsteps of that unfortunate, and within a few minutes of thus abruptly quitting the hospitable shelter of an hour, she stood within the spacious hall of the silent mansion.

The place seemed so vast and so gloomy! Even after procuring the light, she half wished herself forth again upon the wide roads, or taking refuge in the portals of some quiet village homestead where the family had retired to rest.

She could not sit in these high oak chairs, and amidst the congress of shades trooping forth, as it seemed, to stare at her; and taking up the lantern, she approached one of the many doors that led to other rooms, and opening it, entered. It was a well-furnished apartment, once appropriated as a study; the blinds were drawn; a lamp upon the table seemed to have been recently used; books and current newspapers betokened that some one was in the habit of still reading in this room, and "Walter" did not doubt but that it was her new friend or his mother. She felt more cheered by the discovery, and extended her research by proceeding to the chamber adjoining; this, from the costly although dingy nature of the appointments, was manifestly the drawing-room. All the fittings of these old rooms were upon a splendid scale, and but made the desolation more complete. Somehow, while she looked upon them, a sense of bewildering consciousness of having seen the like before stole upon her, and she passed her hands before her eyes, trying to unravel the entanglement of dreams—it must have been in dreams she had seen them, for she had not entered any house save the most ordinary.

Then it chanced that she opened the door of the dining-room, where the moonlight fell through a panel of rose-colored glass full upon the face of Lady Helen's portrait above the mantel. She stood as one transfixed, all the misty pictures taking form and semblance; and when the uncertainty of her wonderment had cleared away, the proud yet beautiful woman came back with all the reality of a creature in the flesh, and unable to resist the impulse, the slight and delicate child, so lonely in her desolate, abandoned misery, knelt before that cold figure of her unfeeling mother, and the simple heart registered a vow that, founded upon her innocent faith, seemed to point to surer happiness than any other.

"I will seek for *my father!*" she cried; "he will not cast me off; it was never by his will. No more looking for strange friends, or purposeless knocking about the great grim world. I will search for my father, nor ever rest until I have discovered, and cast myself upon his love—he is far too good and noble to refuse to help me. The master of this place, then, is my father, God only knows how many miles away from here; but I must reach him somehow, and in spite of perils intervening— I, a runaway of the circus, and without a penny or advice. Oh, that my young friend would come, to advise, to help—"

"I can do both, my child."

With a low cry, "Walter Gordon" rose to her feet, and turning in the direction of the voice, shrank into nothingness before a tall and venerable figure—imposing as one of Michael Angelo's prophets. So commanding and impressive a cast of features she had never seen before, while the eyes of the patriarch covered her with confusion. Powerless as a bird, she could not look above his silver beard, descending with that august symbolism of age which imparts dignity and inspires reverence.

"You seem in trouble. May I help you? shall I advise you?"

Commiseration was in the utterance; the child quivered to the kind expression.

"I thank you with all my heart, Sir. I shall indeed be grateful for your help. I am alone in the world, having no home nor any where to go to—even here I am hiding, and the very beasts of the field are better provided for; but I know that my parentage is noble, and I am trying to trace out my father, who was robbed of me when I was a very little child—"

It all came out, the full burden of her sorrow, all but the revelation of her sex. This man seemed so fatherly and dignified, there could be no risk in entreating his assistance.

"It is in my power to aid you, doubtless. I am Jael-Ishmael, king over the gypsy tribes in England. You may join the band here stationed, if you will."

"Walter" shrank at the proposal; it did not seem any extensive improvement upon the circus life, this proposed casting in of lots with the nomads. The venerable personage noticed her hesitation.

"I thought it might provide you present food and shelter. True, ours is but a wild life among tents, but so much the more free, and the fact of our continuous travelling might aid your object better than remaining stationary. Should you know your father were he to cross your path?"

"Alas! no. I was so little, I fear I should not. I can but seek for that Lord Harold Lindon, once master of this house."

The other smiled a strange, quiet smile, which "Walter" took to be indicative of pity.

"What are your wishes, Sir? For I must be returning to my people."

"Walter Gordon" reflected. It was certain the acceptance of either of those situations mentioned by Lorry Vincent could not facilitate the tracing of Lord Lindon, and what meant that mysterious allusion to danger? She did not feel safe in Sleperton, and that instinctive and warning guide the supersensitive carry in their bosoms counseled departure now the opportunity offered. With a simple faith that moved the sage, although he did not betray emotion, "Walter" put her small hand in that of Jael-Ishmael's, and said, fervently,

"I will go with you, and God will watch over me."

The king over tribes, without more ado, led the way by a tangled and bramble-strewn path to the wood. His introduction was singular, and took this form:

"The lad will be the guest of our tribe a while, until I remove him to the work he may be fitted for."

Not long afterward Lorry Vincent entered at the western door, saw the lantern had been removed, and imagining his new friend was in one of the lower apartments, entered first one and then another, and was both surprised and alarmed not to find the child in whom he was beginning to take so profound an interest. He then went up stairs, went over the whole house, until, finding out the truth by that window opening upon the lawn, he looked serious, and closing his teeth firmly, while his face flushed with anger, said to himself,

"That's Reuben Smith's work again!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ADVERSARY IS CHECKMATED.

It was half past nine in the evening; the mists were rising and gloom hovering above the Serpentine. Over the bridge which crosses the water nearest to Hyde Park Corner, people were idling homeward, a motley company of artisans and traders, of military, of showily robed young females, of well-dressed disreputables, of honest, care-worn work-women, and a few boys and girls.

A gentleman was leaning against the iron-work, watching the passers-by with apparent indifference, but in reality with a keen, close scrutiny.

This was Herbert Garston, and exhibiting some impatience, he opened a leather book, and taking therefrom a letter, he read it over by such dim light as sufficed:

"My dear Garston,—You will be surprised at this note—please apply my oft-repeated injunction never to be surprised by any thing. My life has been a series of surprises and shocks, and I have not yet ceased being both shocked and surprised, as you shall hear—that is, of course, admitting I am surprised now. If surprise were done away with, my dear boy, half the wickedness in the world would be banished, for surprise is the grandfather of impulse, and impulse is the parent of crime. But to proceed with the purpose of this note; and let me tell you, Herbert, if not surprised, I am disgusted. My house is watched by some vulgar spy; only think of a house in *this* street, and with a Beresford in it, being watched! It strikes me your friend the secretary has found out what we are up to, and has in turn placed a watch upon us; but worse than that, he has actually thwarted me—Me, Sir—in buying that Torquay property and in securing the child. He has, I believe, contrived to obtain both; but I can't write upon this—we must talk it over. Meet me somewhere—say on the bridge over the Serpentine, at half past nine, Monday evening—bridge nearest Hyde Park Corner. Don't be surprised if I do not come.

"Yours, Beresford."

Mr. Garston replaced the note, saying to himself, with a pleasant smile,

"Just one of his characteristic epistles, the dear old gentleman. No, I shall not be surprised if I don't see him here. I wonder how long he has been back from Hertfordshire! And I shall have some news for him too. If he is not careful, this cunning secretary will find himself netted, after all; from what I know and what I suspect, I shall not be surprised if we trap him."

Mr. Garston was here surprised by a servant bearing a message from Mr. Beresford Travers.

"Your pardon, Sir; my master sent me here. I was to give you this coupon; he is at the Opera, and will be pleased to see you in the box corresponding with the ticket."

Mr. Garston at once hastened away, and joined his friend behind the curtains of his private box.

"I don't know what you thought of my place of appointment, but I was anxious that we should be free from observation."

"I supposed so, and you thought this would be equally as appropriate and infinitely more agreeable. Good! But to the purport of your note, which gives me some concern."

"Who can this be but Noel Barnard, and what his object unless it be to discover if you came to me or I to you? It is infamous, Sir!"

"It will not annoy you much longer—the man is making the rope."

Beresford Travers looked up at the dry, authoritative tone.

"Rope?"

"That will hang Noel Barnard, Esq. Never did a more eligible tenant wait that becoming end."

"Coarse, Herbert! But what do you mean?"

"First, relate your story."

"With pleasure. I went down to Beresford, as you know. As usual, the old scenes moved me sadly. I could not stay any length of time, but just long enough to settle 'stock and produce' matters with my steward, and to call upon the Percivals, with whom, you may remember, I intended placing the little girl. Following out my plan, I lost no time in travelling to Torquay, located myself at the Imperial, and the first local topic I heard mentioned was the purchase of Eagle Hall by Sir Kinnaird Dalton. I walked over to look at my poor dear boy's old home, and learned from a cottager that Ella and her child had actually passed a night in that emptied house, for every vestige of furniture has been removed. You may imagine my feelings when informed of this; but the worst of it is, upon that very night both mother and child mysteriously disappeared, or, at least, were never seen to leave Eagle Hall. Now mark: upon the morning afterward, a tall, dark gentleman, said to be the secretary of the new proprietor, was seen in the neighborhood very early, long before the arrival of the first train, and—and—in short, I connect the two—"

Mr. Travers paused an instant; his companion had listened to the record of progress with eager attention. The curtain had fallen upon the third act of the opera, and then followed the usual stir among the audience—the orchestra retired, there was flutter of fans and interchange of comment, adjusting of wraps and moving for refreshments. Lovers of music, who preferred it without ices on the one hand or stimulants on the other, closed their eyes, and again seemed to hear some choice *morceau* which had taken their fancy. The people who did not understand Italian were perusing the English libretto, endeavoring to gather sense and reconcile the probabilities; and *habitués* were discussing the respective merits of the popular favorites. People who attend these representations for the spectacle, the *mise-en-scène* proper, made note of the main effects; people who go to look at one another, commented with freedom; and the inevitable couples who, doting on music, dote more on themselves, were intensely occupied. Those who visit the opera exclusively for the ballet, and who are proverbially difficult to satisfy, thought it a wretched swindle to pay so much and see so little; those of the free list, who are a specially fastidious class, thought they were, as usual, signed for a dull night; in fact, every where there was tasteful confusion, and every body seemed preoccupied with his own little gossip. With a cursory glance round, Mr. Beresford Travers resumed, Mr. Garston listening with close attention, and, as yet, passing no observation.

"Walking about those sweet Devon lanes, round old Cockington Church, along Tor Abbey's avenues, and over to that quaint yet pretty nook, Paignton, I seemed to hear Lionel's voice again, singing one of those sacred melodies of which he used to be so fond, echoing between clefts of the rocks, and stealing along the coast-line. The poor boy's voice haunted me with a reality startling even to myself. You are aware the Hall was the private property of Lionel's mother. We had, as you know, passed many very happy hours in the neighborhood during my wife's lifetime: it is no wonder, therefore, if the associations proved affecting. I now come to the point I wished to consult with you upon. Anxious to observe matters from the distance, in such a way that my lord secretary should not suspect my proximity, I took up my quarters at a little inn at Paignton. How I passed the interval between dining and retiring to rest, I don't know, for there was only a local news sheet, a farmers' almanac, a discolored map of the county, a list of fairs, and a stock-auctioneer's bill wherewith to amuse myself. True, there was the alternative of joining the honest yeomen in the bar parlor over their market budget, but I preferred retiring early; these details will weary you. Every thing about my sleeping-room was scrupulously clean, the furniture old-fashioned, the chintz terrific; but my attention was taken chiefly by the chimney-piece, surely as quaint a construction as any in Devon, while a rumbling of the wind down the chimney was a mild edition of contiguous thunder. The wind increased in the night to such an extent I fancied old Boreas must have aroused himself in honor of my visit; anyway, it prevented my sleeping, if it did nothing more. But after a while it did considerably more; I was galvanized into sitting up in bed, scared and speculating, for I distinctly heard something blown down the chimney, not heavy with the sound of masonry, but more the rustling, tumbling, slipping noise of a parcel or bundle. Now I have a theory that people do not often put their goods and chattels up their chimneys, and it was not long before I had a light, examining the parcel, with that unpleasant sensation one experiences when prepared for the worst. If I did not discover the worst, I revealed that which led up to a train of exceedingly unpleasing ruminations; for there, rolled up and carelessly tied with string and bound round with paper, was a child's frock. I examined the little garment, and in the pocket, Herbert, I found this handkerchief."

Mr. Travers handed his friend a small hemstitched lady's handkerchief, marked with the initials E. T. Herbert Garston touched it reverently and returned it immediately; his head drooped a degree lower, and he appeared very thoughtful. Again he reserved comment. Mr. Travers continued:

"You will imagine I had no rest the remainder of that night. With the dawn I was abroad, glad to meet the freshening breeze on Paignton sands—never was up so early before in my life, never want to be again, although, of course, it is eminently reviving for those who can stand it. Well, I went for a long walk, and returned to breakfast at my inn. Before entering, however, I walked over to a shop opposite, where furniture and carpets, pier-glasses and curtains, were displayed in the window. What for? you will say; the fancy occurred to me it might be well to inspect the exterior of my domicile without exciting attention."

Mr. Garston nodded approvingly.

"One of the mirrors was slightly inclined, and from its position exactly caught the house where I had passed the night; and while apparently looking at the furniture exposed for sale, I minutely examined the building thus reflected. One of the oldest of Paignton houses—the exterior, with its weather-worn sign and tawny bricks, was rather picturesque than not; flowers in fir-cone baskets, and a trail of the pretty thunbergia half-way over the portals; narrow, lozenged windows, with low muslin blinds and chintz curtains; and—prepare, my dear boy, and guard against surprise—at one of the windows a figure that, unaware I was conscious of its presence, was intently watching my actions: it was—"

"*Le Diable?*"

Mr. Garston had spoken at last.

"Yes; Noel Barnard!"

"Ay, and he is watching you now; look across!"

There, in an opposite box, sat the mysterious man whom all their cleverness seemed unable to outwit: impassive as marble, merely studying a classical procession painted upon the proscenium; a quiet observer, with a profile of strangely composed and thoughtful lines, a reserve of power firmly expressed about the brow, the mouth, and the eyes—without doubt the most noticeable figure in the building.

Anon, the stage was crowded by a chorus, which burst forth into loud strains of praise. The music of the act—the most imposing in the opera—caught the attention of even those least regardful of its melodious utterance, if the term be applicable to the majesty of *Le Prophète.* It was the cathedral scene: with solemnity the procession filed across the stage, the gentle strains with their impressive burden quivering in that lyric temple, as in some mediæval Temple of the Cross. With marked effect the scene had proceeded to the meeting of mother and son, even that calm saturnine spectator of the opposite box was pointing his *lorgnette* in the direction of the stage, when Mr. Travers leaned slightly over to Garston and remarked:

"I must be going; I can not sit it out with that man confronting us. Tell me quickly if you are in possession of new data."

"I had better write you at an early opportunity; meantime allow me to give you this. I can not understand how a man of Noel Barnard's foresight could be so careless; it was picked up in his study by the servant I am employing."

He handed the old gentleman a slip of blotting-paper, indicating at the same time the miniature glass suspended upon the partition of the box. Held before this, the marks upon the paper took legible form, and Beresford Travers read:

"......there is but one way.....the child must ....I leave Torquay for town to ....you will instruct Rolf to keep young Garston in.......I am aware of Travers's motive ..possession of the child..........meeting at the Seven Tuns on Friday night."

"Shall I keep this, or will you?" asked Mr. Travers, biting his lip as he rose to leave.

"I will place it with my other links in the chain." The gentlemen quitted the box.

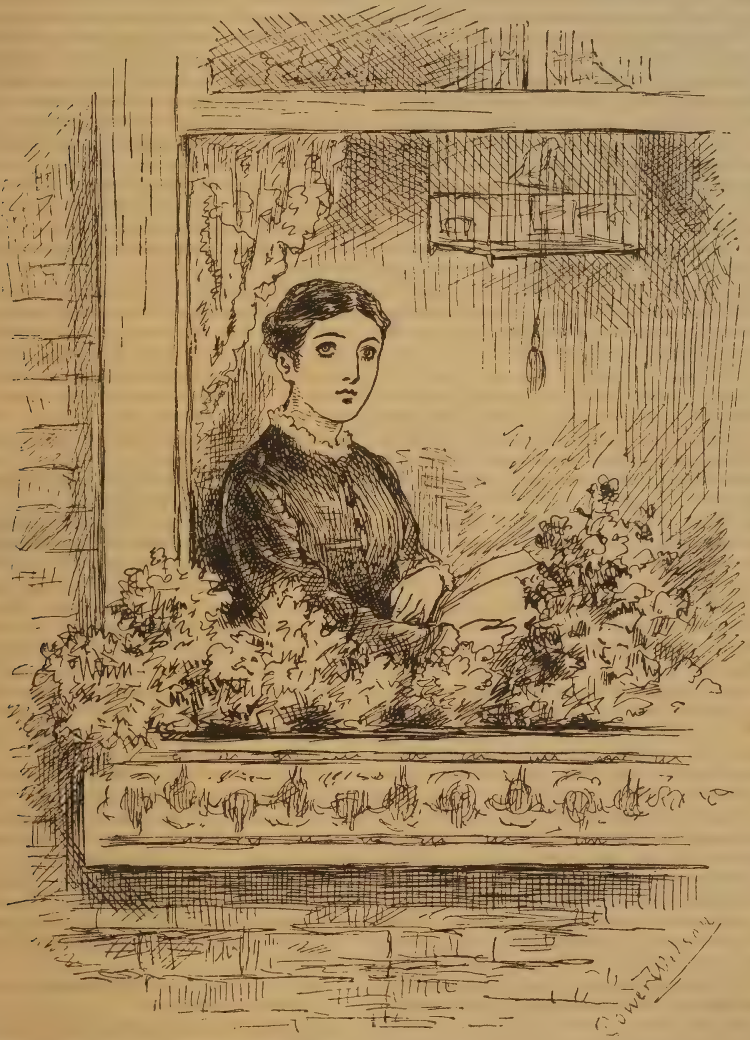
The imperturbable watcher over the way, who had observed the proceedings with intense relish, merely twisted his *lorgnette* to a clearer focus, with the congratulatory apothegm—

"I think that example of finesse could not have operated more advantageously."

CHAPTER XVII.

GABRIELLE.

If the reader at any time, in coming from the terminus of the Great Western Railway, has, by chance, accident, or design, penetrated the privacy of Queen Street, Paddington, he may have been struck by the extreme gentility of that neighborhood. Two long terraces of white-fronted houses; two long rows of gardens some horticultural society might have in its particular keeping, so neatly arranged is every flower bed, so carefully removed is each dead leaf, dry twig, large stone, and worm-upheaved mound; and two long lines of elaborately painted and richly grained doors, with two long chains of highly burnished knockers.



"AT THE PARLOR WINDOW OF NO. 9 IS OFTEN SEEN A FAIR, SLIGHT GIRL OF PREPOSSESSING APPEARANCE."

The coster fraternity avoid Queen Street upon principle; the barrel-organ never makes a descent upon its inviolate quietude; it is the haven of rest for people with distracted nerves, and it is much frequented by thinkers.

There is advantage in residing in a street of this description. Rents are moderate, rates and taxes not oppressive; there are no nocturnal brawlings, nor yet a public-house within a stone's-throw; the dwellings are so pitched that there is every convenience for studying one's neighbors; and there is agreeable scarcity of itinerant vendors and mendicants.

Half the residents of this calm quarter go to church; the other half sit behind the curtains and pass remarks upon the appointments and properties of the devotional portion, after which they retire to shady back-rooms and sleep again.

No piano, organ, or harmonium awakens the echo in Queen Street.

We have business with the residents in two of these houses. Upon either side the way they are within view of each other's windows. The postal number says 9 to the house upon the right hand, 180 to that upon the left; both houses are the pink of respectability. At the parlor window of No. 9 is often seen a fair, slight girl of prepossessing appearance and remarkably lady-like manners. She is working sometimes, more frequently reading a manuscript; sometimes the fair, slight girl holds up sugar or groundsel to her bird, when it is remarked that her figure is symmetrical, her attitude graceful, her action endearing and winning. It is also remarked that when the sun falls upon that side, it circles about her head like an aureole—her beautitul brown hair, of the warm tone Titian loved, is always arranged with excess of neatness; that her dresses are of the quietest colors, with narrow tuckers of good lace; and that she wears no jewelry. Sometimes, when bending over the manuscript she is so often reading, the clearly cut features take upon them the delicacy and refinement and thought familiar to us who love the Beatrice, the Joan, and the Lady Grey of Delaroche; yet are they mobile features, and, if intellectual and spiritual, are often lighted by vivacity and animation. Her cousin, George Percival, the writer of the manuscript, painting this fair being in one of his novels, thus expressed himself, "Gabrielle, an almost ideal character, but sufficiently human to be interesting." Leave the description there; it is from the hand of a lover-cousin, and can not be improved upon by garnishing of fine writing. All these Percivals were thorough; there was no shade of affectation about any of them; they came of a stock that despised the unreal; brave and honest and self-sacrificing, with hearts loving and true. George, the author-cousin, is the son of well-to-do parents, farmers down in Hertfordshire; the family had been tenants of the Beresfords for generations, and were regarded by Mr. Travers with much esteem. George Percival lives with his uncle until such time as himself and the fair girl go forth, as these children do, to form a home for themselves. They have been together from boy and girlhood, and in homely language their country friends have declared them cut out for one another. George Percival holds an excellent position as manager of the London and Olympian Bank; he has worked his way up to this, and the responsible dignity is deservedly merited. Not a young man in London is more respected by the directors; and not only these, but also the gentlemen under him, hold George Percival in affectionate regard, for he is ever ready to help a young man on, and would at any time go out of his way to do a service for them or his employers. Thus, when their chief clerk was taken ill and died, he did the man's work, in addition to his own, without a word, until the new clerk came—a reserved but diligent worker, named Stephen Miles, who gained Percival's confidence by his steadiness and quietness. Come in when he would, Stephen was always at the methodical penmanship: such principle wins favor of those at the head. Not long after the appointment of Stephen Miles—whose references and testimonials, by-the-way, were a mile long—a fresh depositor had been entered upon the books. The name was written *Noel Barnard, Esq.*, 180 *Queen Street, Paddington.* It was not a large amount, one hundred pounds or thereabouts; sufficient to constitute the gentleman a depositor.

One day the fair girl sitting at the window saw a neat little conveyance stop at 180. A quick-stepping horse, with silver harness, driven by an expensively attired lady, parasol on whip, reins firm in hand, color on cheek, audacity in her eye; an elegant vehicle of bijou proportions, of fairy-like lightness, furnished throughout with the luxury of a boudoir. In the rear was a page, or tiger, with a fair girl face, lithe limbs, faultless livery, and wicked, laughing eyes bent upon the steed held in dainty control. It was a tasteful, albeit questionable conveyance, and people in Queen Street ventured upon little wagers with themselves anent the proprieties; yet 180 was one of the quietest houses in the street, and the tall gentleman there resident, who was so seldom seen, the most decorous of all the genteel households. There were lady writers of the quieter order in Queen Street, and these were of opinion this bold intruder upon their calm track was one of those daring novelists whose characters are all sketched from the improper point of view, whose scenes are vivid rhapsodies of the vicious, and whose journeying through life they imagine to be of this silver-harness and chiming-bells order of progress.

The fair girl saw the lady enter the house opposite, remain some little time, and return to her conveyance with one of the most eccentric-looking characters ever seen in Queen Street. He had never been observed to enter at 180, and no person knew of his staying there; hence this departure aroused commotion, and more than one tea-table was enlivened beyond precedent, somewhat as follows:

"But who is he, my dear? And do you know any one who saw him go in?"

"Alas! no; we can learn positively nothing. There is something vastly mysterious about the occurrence; and yet he is such a nice-looking gentleman who lives there—so aristocratic and ministerial. Do you know, I somehow fancy he is not aware of that person calling. Perhaps the strange-looking individual is his servant, and this woman a loose connection. Alas! we live in a wicked and deceitful world; but I do think the dear gentleman who lives there ought to be told of it, so pleasant as he looks, and so soft-spoken. Poor Bella is quite in love with him."

"Now I think he is a merchant in the City, probably, with a house in the country. We know he has something to do with the City, for we have seen him in one of the Friday Street warehouses when we have been waiting for papa."

"I think your papa said to my papa that he had a warehouse of his own, and that it was a firm trading under the style of Barnard, Rolf, and Co."

"Yes, in Indian produce, costly shawls, and such like."

"Perhaps the odd-looking man is Mr. Rolf?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

Once, when George Percival returned home from the day's duties, he brought Mr. Miles to dine. He was a colorless gentleman, and his hair might have grown upon one of the bank ledgers, so indistinct was its shading. His eyes had a habit of turning up in the most extraordinary fashion, producing a creeping sensation upon the beholder; however, as he seldom looked at any one, and rarely lifted his eyes, this was the cause of but slight inconvenience. His fellow-clerks accounted for his preoccupation by supposing him always engaged in intuitive calculation. Mr. Percival, who was a reader of character, thought differently. Once the chief clerk had alluded in a reverent, dimly affectionate sort of manner, to a widowed mother, and George, dearly loving his own kind-hearted Christian mother, away down there in Hertfordshire, judged by himself, and believed Stephen to have her health and loneliness at heart.

Gabrielle Percival did not take to Mr. Miles. Perhaps it was the touch of his hand, which was cold and clammy; perhaps that odd look about the eyes, which turned her cold also; or it may have been the insipid and indefinite tints, for Gabrielle liked some expression in a man: anyway, she kept as remote from Mr. Miles as politeness would admit.

Do not suppose this pair of cousins tallied with the cousin-lovers of the novelists and dramatists, the stock relations who are so ardent in their attachment, so young and handsome, so recklessly impassioned. These good people were never exuberant in that way. They were neither of them under thirty; both of them possessed practical good sense; both of them were patient and steady-going workers. Of the two, perhaps, George possessed most romance in his composition, as was natural, being a writer. He had been rather successful with his books, and was beginning to be widely read, owing, doubtless, to the absence of vulgarity upon the pages, and the sensitiveness and refinement which he always considered superior to breadth and effect.

"You write a great deal, Mr. Percival?" said Stephen Miles, after dinner, his hand upon the manuscript Gabrielle had laid upon the author's writing-table.

"Yes, I write; I find it pleasant and congenial leisure work."

"Ah! very pretty. Had I the brains, I would do the same. Of course you don't write under your own name. Might I ask with what well-known *nom de plume* I may identify you? I should much like to read some of your work."

"Sorry to refuse you, but that is the property of my publishers; I am rather fastidious upon points of honor."

"Ah, very right; I admire your principles, and while I agree with the reserve, humbly ask your pardon for the inquisitiveness. Your album, Miss Percival? Yes, very pretty; I do like these collections of treasured family faces. Alas! we can not bring the departed back again; we can but preserve 'the shadow ere the substance fade.'" And the visitor softly used a lizard-green pocket-handkerchief, giving his eyes that awful roll, ten times more electrifying than a thunder-storm.

Mr. Percival was glancing down the review column of a paper; the visitor had the album open at the portrait of a little girl, some distant relative's child, and this the gentleman was good enough to pronounce,

"Very pretty—adds to the interest of any album. You are fond of children, Mr. Percival?"

He was alluding to George's well-known partiality for the little ones, who took all his stray coins and kisses, and regarded him as very like the prince of their dreams. The respectable widow woman in charge of the bank offices had one little girl, and being an amiable and pretty child, the manager made much of her. It was sweet pleasure to turn from the dry, matter-of-fact accounts, at such times as he left the office or bank parlor for the inner rooms, to the innocent poetry of the child. For to this higher-strung nature all the movements and manners of childhood were rhythmical and beautiful, and all the words and lisping and laughter were filled musically and with the tenderest of minstrelsy.

George looked quietly up from the review.

"Yes, Sir; I agree with Southey that no house is properly furnished without them."

Gabrielle was engaged upon some plain sewing. She stretched the work and made it even and level, and resumed her stitching.

What a calm nature it appeared, as unlike as could be to those storm-shaken souls, with their emotional depths, one reads about and meets day after day!

Gabrielle well knew all George's partiality for childhood. He had few secrets from her. To some extent she sympathized, looked upon it in a large measure as an author's hobby; and knew, moreover, the men of the City, plodding all day among the dull tracts where never a child is seen, were most of them child-lovers. So she listened pleasantly, and fell in with George's views, and thought it a dainty, albeit extravagant fancy, when he, one evening, told her he should some day perhaps adopt a little girl. True, she had just looked up with the grave, kind eyes, and said,

"Shall I not be enough, George?"

Whereat Cousin George, all undisturbed, replied,

"Perhaps so; but you are different, you know; grown up and wise and good—"

"And a little old, George, to supply the place of a child in your house!" Said so quietly, with the plain sewing, like a down stitching of reproach and regret.

"Well, of course one does not supply the place of the other, nor would we wish it to. A child is the completion of the charm of a house. Woman is the grace, the goodness, the wisdom, of home; childhood its sunshine, its music, its beauty. I intend in my next book to have a child or children prominent in some ideal sense."

"I don't think it will do, dear," in the same quiet tone, shaking the head with gentle gesture of dissent. "You are so fond of children, I fear you would overdo the theme. People are realistic over this matter, and are rather jealous if boy or girl be exalted to the dignity of a hero or heroine."

"Nay, such is not my significance of prominence. I would ever keep children children, else would the savor of childhood be lost. But, seriously, you underrate the part they play in literature and art. How does the introduction of a child soften a painting or a poem! And some of the best poets and most courted of painters have had their reputation created by their child-pieces. I remember Mr. Charles Dickens once saying, 'Children made my fortune.' I do not think people are half so insensible to their charms, when introduced in the arts, as you imagine. I notice at the Academy the public are quickest caught by, and stand in greatest number before, the child-pieces. I have found upon the stage the most successful plays have depended upon child performers for those shadings of pathos and beauty which have taken hold upon the sympathies of the audience. I am told the greatest run upon novels at the libraries is for such books as contain the poetry of love in childhood; and I must say in life I think that it is a poor and commonplace history if never influenced by a child."

"You plead the cause of your little favorites with eloquence. I have no doubt there is many a child a comfort to many a heart not its parent, within which *it alone* preserves the human and the good."

"Thanks, dear, for agreeing with me so far. I thought you would, you are so sensible."

"What will you entitle your work?"

"The other day, when coming home upon the omnibus, I passed a drawing-room window, where, upon a table, was some china, apparently of age and value. In the centre was a vase of delicate white and pink flowers. Seated by the window were two ladies and some pretty boys and girls. You know I weave something of every thing—the combination struck me, and I seized upon the title,

Flowers and China,

for my book, which should have a more significant depth than the mere ephemeral story of the hour."

"'*Flowers and China*'—a quaint title. Reminds me of Richter's 'Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces.'"

"It will traverse other ground. I select the title for these reasons: A Flower is the symbol of Youth; China, of Age; both, of delicacy and beauty. Life may be compared with a garden, or a collection of rare porcelain. It is all a pageant of color. The kinship of china and flowers borrows beauty of grouping: that is unique which is ideal by contrast. While Man—Woman—Child may be broken rhythm, and yet perfect sonance, of an opera of love and pain; Man—Child may be the clearer yet less common strain, and the pain be crowned by love, while but a reed may lend the music. Life hath more features yet than books have chronicled, songs sung, or paintings idealized. There is that more bitter than loss, more desolate than loneliness, when the flower hath forgotten its perfume, and the china is robbed of its music. A revelry of sweet shapes, a clustered glow of sensitive color, the ringing chimes of delicious vessels, sculptured symmetry of goblets and broad beauty of ewers, lily vases and a threading of silver, cerulean idyls by strong tracks of gold, dense purple and pale yellow roses looped and inmeshed in a net of forget-me-nots, a scattering of daisy and wild violet bloom upon the moss—I see a wondrous picture, idyl and poem, and composed of nothing but flowers and china!"

She had let the work fall, and had given herself to listening to this half-allegoric talk, in which he sometimes indulged during those precious seasons of their being alone together, but which she more often read from his writing. It was all as a revelation to her, more full of the poetical than the practical, yet possessing a charm she would not have confessed to any one.

Mr. Stephen Miles was still turning the leaves of Miss Percival's album, when the master and mistress of the house arrived home from an afternoon's shopping.

Mr. Percival, a genial and kind-hearted man, who had made a large fortune at book-selling, looked very naturally in a kind-hearted manner upon his nephew's fancy for authorship, although he often counseled, "Stick to the figures, George; don't write too much."

Mrs. Percival was a copious edition of the worthy book-seller; perhaps a degree less gentle in her manner, a degree less mild in her opinion; but, taken for all in all, a not unworthy prototype. Certainly the lady had prejudices; but then so have we all; and one of these prejudices took the form of an inveterate aversion to the reptilish; any thing, as Mrs. Percival expressed it, from a cockroach to a crocodile, giving her the trembles.

Thus, when her own warm hand encountered that so cold and clammy of Stephen Miles, she felt, as she told Percival later, "as if her hour had come"—an effect that received its full force upon his turning the awful orbs with their most diabolic roll. From that moment Mrs. Percival resolved "that young man shouldn't dine again at their table. Why, she would be dreaming of snakes and all sorts of viperous things for nights!"

Mr. Percival, who had heard nephew George commend the chief clerk for his business qualifications, was not thus impressed, and mildly told his wife it was another of her prejudices. He had combated them in his counter days, when the more cautious half deliberately declined opening an account with such of their customers as she did not like the look of.

"But, gracious me! Never a one entered our shop all the time we were in business who made me feel so creepy as that friend of George's, who is more like a ichneumon than a man, and with a twist to his eyes I'll see in the dark for nights to come. I'm glad I haven't money in their bank, for I'd never put any more in. I never did have faith in George's judgment about people; he's too wrapped up in his writing to be alive to the crawling things of the earth."

In the course of conversation the holidays were spoken of. George Percival had recently returned from a month in Hertfordshire; the other gentlemen of the bank were upon the *qui-vive* as to their own term.

"You found it very quiet, Sir, in that part of the country?" And Mr. Miles indulged in one of those ocular displays significant of a picture of the quiet Hertfordshire tract held in reserve within.

"I take interest, for home association's sake, in all connected with the country; apart from this, I did not find the time hang heavily on my hands."

A curious change, all in a moment, flashed across George Percival's face, the thoughtfulness seeming to give place to an expression of joyousness that died away again upon the instant; but not before it was observed by Stephen Miles.

They were sitting by the window; the most refreshing air Paddington yields in her border days between summer and autumn floated in among the flowers Gabrielle took such great pride over. A brougham drove up to No. 180, and the tall inhabitant was seen to alight and assist from the vehicle a delicate-looking boy of prepossessing appearance, who walked slowly, and as though far from strong.

"Who now, I wonder?" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, who was standing behind her daughter's chair. "They're a curious lot over the way! That Mr. Barnard is a gentleman I would be sorry to have much to do with."

The visitor rolled his eyes over in the direction of the gentleman ringing the bell opposite, and, while waiting, the gentleman looked across the way, and possibly encountered that singular expression. He placed a hand paternally upon the child's head; at the same moment the door was opened from within, and Noel Barnard, with "Walter Gordon," entered and was lost to sight.

"A new apprentice to the wholesale!" remarked Mr. Percival, Senior; "I hope they will make a good man of business of him. Figures and work, Mr. Miles; nothing like figures and work."

"Percival," said Mrs. Percival, with majesty, "at our time of life, for goodness' sake let us have done with figures!"

"True, my dear; but one can not see a youth like that, in all probability fresh from the country, entering upon a mercantile life in this crowded city without experiencing some sort of interest."

The visitor raised his hand benevolently, and quietly and approvingly remarked,

"Your sentiments do you much honor, Sir. The industries of this empire present a sublime example of the indefatigable activity of the great thinkers and workers. Middle-class society is composed of very worthy men, Mr. Percival."

Mr. Percival nodded pleasantly, rubbing his hands, and taking it as in part compliment to himself. Mrs. Percival, however, walked away to her housekeeping, with the shrewd rejoinder,

"Worthy enough till you find them out, I dare say."

The visitor shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say it was an indisputable fact that there was a considerable number of people about who would not obtain the highest of references. Soon afterward he took his leave, and the lady of the house breathed again.

Gabrielle sat late in her chamber that night, thinking. Sat by the open window, looking out over the gray panorama, with its curves and lines of light; with windows of a small street at their back where court-yards met their gardens, growing black and still, one by one. Thinking of her future, with that placid gentleness which was so eminently her characteristic, but thinking more seriously than she had ever done before. She had been so happily restful in regard to George, the thought never occurred to her until this evening: what if he, after all, found himself mistaken in his supposed abiding love for her? What if it should prove the sequence of years passed in each other's gentle company? What if, upon some sudden crisis in his life, he should centre his affections upon some other object? Where would she be then, and what prospect, save a memory all sad and bitter pain, would be left to her? Time was flitting, her youth had vanished like a dream, almost uncounted in the pleasant waiting; ever with him, she had troubled little, and had never visited at the houses of others, or been even for once in the company of another; it was because her love induced that satisfied repose which is the very perfection of the sentiment. It was only the shadow of restraint, the merest hint of the reserved, in her cousin's manner, had led to this; but it was a clouding which, though no larger than a man's hand, yet assumed formidable proportions from its very rarity. Then she comforted herself,

"I am sure George would tell me if there was any thing."

Next day, sitting at her window, long after both George and their opposite neighbor had gone off to the City, the fair girl, not yet recovered from her thinking fit, saw "Walter Gordon," whom they had noticed entering the house of Mr. Noel Barnard the previous evening, also sitting by the window, seeming very dejected, and looking wistfully across at the gentle and lovable face, as though she would like to fly and nestle beside her while she confided all the heart was full of. And Gabrielle's heart moved her to some expression of interest.

"I believe he is all alone; if it did not look bold, I would go over to him, for I am sure the boy is wretched; I should like to beckon him."

She did put up her hand, but the forwardness of the action, from the neighbors' point of view, checked her implied sympathy.

"If it had been any other house! But I am half afraid of offending that man; and, after all, I have no right to interfere. Dear mother would tell me to mind my own business."

Still that lonely and uncared-for look upon the face smote her, for Gabrielle was quick to discern grief, and sensitively took the sorrows of others unto herself. She looked across again, and saw that the child was weeping, and she could restrain herself no longer, so she signaled, inviting the child with all the energy of her affectionate heart. In the fact of the childhood lies the excuse. At first "Walter" did not seem to understand the movement, and then, when it was repeated, was hesitative and timorous, yet rose as about to comply with the invitation. Nodding with a reassuring smile, Gabrielle rose also as though waiting, and the child hurried across the street, and was tenderly received by this new friend. Thus simply are some of the most complex schemes thrown out of order.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WALTER GORDON" FINDS A STANCH FRIEND.

GABRIELLE took the child's slender hands within her own, and saying some kind and welcoming word, led her to a seat removed from observation.

"You have been suffering; you are not well. I could not help asking you to come; I saw you were unhappy."

"Heaven bless you, dear lady, for your kind notice; I was indeed feeling unutterably miserable."

"Because you have been brought from home to learn the business?"

The child shuddered, and covered the pretty face with her hands.

"If that can be called a business which is ignoble subjection to the base purposes of intrigue, then I am too truly learning the business."

"But Mr. Barnard—I thought him a merchant in the City—"

"He is every thing, and every where. He is, I believe, the Evil One in person—such is the opinion of the wise readers of the stars of whom he is chief; they fear him, hate him, yet hold his equal has not been seen in modern times. He is certainly clever—the tangled skein of his contriving would require more than one, two, or three to unwind. He has me entirely in his hands. I am homeless, fatherless. I seek both. It is to aid this search that I am in his possession; he has promised me his assistance."

"And you can take that man's word?"

"Yes. I do not think he would break his

word with friend or foe; his is a singular nature, so many qualities are at variance one with another. I believe he will assist me, but first make liberal use of my services in his own interest; and these I should not begrudge were it for honorable work, but what he requires of me is repelling to my every sense of right, truth, and justice."

The words, older than the apparent youth of the speaker seemed to warrant, led Gabrielle to look more intently at the slightly formed creature, and then the quick eyes of her sex detected the disguise.

"You yourself are scarcely what you seem, I think."

"I will explain in a few words. I have escaped from hard task-masters of a travelling circus. You can imagine why I have assumed this boy's dress, which has thus far proved so much in my favor; I am apprenticed to them, and if I am traced, shall be severely punished."

"But it is terrible being subject to this strange man, whose intentions, you infer, are evil in the extreme."

"Nay, I would not vouch thus far. I simply say he seems to have the resources of twenty detective offices at his fingers' ends, and to make use of almost every one he comes in contact with, independent of his especial clerks or servants."

"I am afraid my power to help you is very slight, but any thing that I can do, I will."

"Can you help me to escape from that man?"

"To do that, you would require somewhere to go to." Gabrielle reflected, and not least of the points of her forethought had reference to Mr. Barnard himself; it was unadvisable to make an enemy of a man who, in pursuit of his object or purpose, was evidently accustomed to put aside all conventional principles, and utterly to disregard all the ordinary dictates of humanity. But then again came in her desire to aid this forlorn boy-girl whose pitiful life she might be the means of brightening, and Gabrielle was ever ready to minister to the suffering and the oppressed.

"I think, perhaps, if I wrote to my uncle and aunt in Hertfordshire, they would be glad to have you there; of course about a farm-house there are many light employments you could undertake very well, and I have no doubt you would be happy and comfortable. I will write this very day."

"Walter's" gratitude knew no bounds; seizing her new friend's hand, she kissed it with that touching respect and homage which is the very ideal of devotion; she then, for prudence' sake, returned to her position at the opposite window, and not long afterward Gabrielle saw Mr. Noel Barnard's housekeeper enter from her morning's marketing. The domestic manager of his house might have been carved, after his own design, from adamant. It may safely be asserted there was but one woman of her kind upon the globe, and that one woman Noel Barnard had, by instinct, unearthed. Very soon after the woman's entrance the child disappeared, and Gabrielle did not see her again all that day; she, however, wrote the promised letter, pleading the cause of her *protégée* with simple yet impressive eloquence, and she sent this to the post at once, fearful of her little one's removal.

When George came home she told him what she had done, only reserving, as she had reserved in her letter, the fact of the child's sex, being entreated to do so by the girl herself; believing, moreover, with her, that this would but excite a prejudice against her in the minds of those she was seeking to interest. To her suprise, George seemed any thing but favorably impressed; he said he would rather she had waited his return, and that he thought in quiet country places the advent of a stranger, under any but openly declared circumstances, was sure to be noticed; he hoped his father would recognize this, and write declining.

"Why, George, this *is* unlike you, generally so willing to help the troubled!"

"So I am in this instance; I but object to the boy's going to my father's, because—I don't see what use he will be—and—and—I should not like them to get into any trouble at their time of life. I am thinking of the proprietor of the circus."

"Did you notice the child last night?"

"Yes, a pretty boy. Why?"

"I fancied his appearance might plead for him."

That evening and the next George sat close at his writing. One day Gabrielle caught a glimpse of her little friend, and she was glad, for it told her she was still there.

In due course came Uncle Percival's letter. Yes, he would receive the lad into his house, and "your aunt will see what she can make of him."

The question now was how to communicate this piece of good news. Eagerly did the fair helper watch for the housekeeper's going out, but this only happened once a week, when the sphinx transacted her seven days' business with precise and expeditious regularity. However, to be in readiness, Gabrielle made a little parcel of the letter and ten shillings in silver; but how to transfer this to the object of her kind aid was the difficulty. The next time she saw her she held it up to prepare her for its reception; the child signed to the other end of the room, as it seemed; but after she had gone from the window, upon thinking it over, Gabrielle came to the conclusion it was the back garden she wished to direct her attention to; then Gabrielle set her wits to work.

Behind the opposite terrace she knew very well there was a line of small houses with back yards, corresponding with those at the rear of their own house. She might, upon some pretext, gain access to the yard at the back of No. 180; she must count the houses to make certain of the one; when in the yard, she could throw the parcel over into Mr. Barnard's garden, where she must depend upon good fortune for its being discovered by the right person. Had Gabrielle possessed more cunning and subtlety, she would have devised a much better method than this; but simple and ingenuous as she was, it struck her on the spur of the moment as the best plan to follow, and she at once put on her bonnet and mantle for the performance of her design.

It was a very mean and narrow street, where laundresses seemed to have drifted in a colony. She counted off the houses with the accuracy of a tax collector, and found the house she was looking for belonged to a laundress also. It was necessary to devise some excuse for her calling, and Gabrielle could think of nothing better than proposing to send the woman some of their rough washing, dusters and tea-cloths and articles of that description. She knocked, and the brawny mistress of the house came to the door. The lady said she had called about some washing, and was civilly invited to step inside; then the lady said she would like to send a few things once a fortnight—upon Mondays, and—could she see the yard? The woman hesitated. "We haven't much drying ground, ma'am; but of course you know what London is, very different to the country where I was brought up; but though we're small, we're clean and hairy."

"It will be more satisfactory to see it, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, ma'am; step through, please, and mind your 'ead. You'll excuse the cinder bin; my good man was about emptying it this morning, only I 'ad to send some linen 'ome to a large school I washes for."

It was the most diminutive chicken-walk that ever was seen, beautifully unadorned, and edged, after the advanced juvenile school, with oyster-shells. The mound to which the woman had drawn extenuating attention was of formidable dimensions, and was the habitual castle defended by half of the laundress's children, while the other half attacked and besieged with energy and fury. At the end some scarlet-runners afforded pretext for walking up to the same with a kind word appreciative of their growth. Having asked the woman for a card, which she went in-doors to procure, Gabrielle seized the time, and standing by the beans, deftly threw the parcel over.

Almost on the instant there appeared from the other side, towering above the wall, a head, which frightened Gabrielle (so unexpected was its arrival) as much as do the ogre heads of pantomime those innocent mortals who are supposed to venture too near their retreats.

It was the head of the owner of the garden, surmounted by an elaborately worked smoking-cap, cigar in mouth, dressing-gown upon his shoulders, and in his white hand a beautifully bound volume.

"Permit me!" and with the utmost politeness he handed the lady the small parcel. Piqued beyond description, Gabrielle took this from him, and at the same moment saw the child at an upper window. Mr. Barnard bowed to the lady, and the lady bowed to Mr. Barnard, while the laundress, standing hands on hips, appeared to be of opinion there was still more going on in the world than her philosophy dreamed of. Then the owner of the garden glided gently down to his rustic seat, lifted his long legs American fashion, gracefully adjusted his gown beside him, allowed a hand to caress the ferns by the garden chair, leaned his head back, and then went comfortably off to sleep.

Miss Percival, meantime, regained her presence of mind, and, courteously thanking the woman, made for home, more than ever alert in the interests of "Walter Gordon."

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRAY DAWN OF LOVE.

"Mrs. Brandon!"

"My love!"

"The yacht is still in our waters; I saw it today."

"Indeed?" The pale woman lifted her large black eyes and sighed; then, removing a white rose from her bosom, she laid it upon the table with tantalizingly poetic effect. Lena threw herself upon a chair, and, rapping its back with the vehemence of an auctioneer, she exclaimed,

"You do put me out so with those lackadaisical ways; I would ever so much prefer you would start up and whistle, or scream, or—any thing, rather than that cold, calm, unmoved manner. I do hate you when you're like that; and as you're generally so, there isn't much love lost."

"Miss St. Aubyn is not growing more ladylike, I am sorry to say."

"Miss St. Aubyn is not growing at all; Miss St. Aubyn has received orders to stop growing. Papa said to me to-day, looking almost as dismal as yourself, 'How much I would give could I but keep my little girl as she is at present!'"

"And what did you say? 'I will always be your own dear little girl, papa?'"

"No, I didn't. I said, 'I am not your little girl now, papa. I'm grown a great big girl; and I don't mean to have out my doll any more, or tease pussy, or eat the preserves. I'm going to be sedate and ugly, like Mrs. Brandon.' That's what I said, dear; and I suppose I was rude, as usual;" and without waiting for the reply—she was in one of her wicked moods—Lena turned her back upon the housekeeper.

Hortense Brandon shrugged her shoulders, but showed no resentment beyond a sarcastic smile, and quietly trifling with the locket suspended at her throat; she could put up with a great deal of Miss Lena's plain speech without betraying annoyance.

"And what did papa say?"

"Oh, he became so pale I thought the bad headache he suffered from the day after that dreadful man was here whom Mr. Barnard sent off, had returned; and I went and put my arms round his neck, my naughtiness quite gone, and tried to coax him back to color."

"Good girl!"

"He flushed, and sitting down, took me upon his knee, looking so mournfully into my face; and he said,

"'I have somewhere heard or read, my Lena, that when a girl gives up her doll, it is to love something else.'

"So then, with my arm round his neck, I answered, as lovingly as ever I could,

"'What more, my dear papa, than to give extra love to you?'"

"That was very pretty and very good of you. Papa liked that, of course?"

"I think so. He kissed me," said Lena, facing the lady again. "Soon afterward he seemed to be thoughtful, and all at once said,

"'I had a dream—a curiously painful dream—last night, Lena. I dreamed that you were lost to me.'"

Mrs. Brandon pushed her footstool a little away from her as by a movement of impatience, dropping stitches, pricking herself, and feeling her breath come short and sharp.

"'What a strange dream, papa!' I said. 'It comes of that man forcing himself in upon you.'

"'Yes; but that shall never happen, my darling, shall it? even if any one tried to take you from me? Ah, Lena, is there a more terrible misfortune in this world than the loss of a child—I will not say by death, but when stolen from one?'

"I did not know what to say, for I had never thought about it; I kissed papa again, assured him he should never, never, never lose his Lena, slipped down, just ran to take one peep at the yacht, and—came in to you, you dear disagreeable old thing."

There was a pause of some minutes. It was very warm; Lena lazily cooled herself with a fan that fluttered with Indian feathers and gleamed with Indian gems. Upon a side table was a dish of iced pine-apple, and the young lady proceeded to devote herself to this with a languid enjoyment.

"Lena!"

"Mrs. Brandon!" The red lips moist with juice of the cool fruit, the little mouth quite full, while she replied.

"I suppose you have no sort of recollection of your dear mamma? Of course you are aware I did not know poor Mrs. St. Aubyn."

"Yes; I've a very strong recollection of mamma. I remember her tall figure, her grace, her calmness—not a dead-and-alive sort of calmness like yours, but the elegance and impassive tranquillity of some empress. I remember her haughty type of beauty, her cold, cruel nature. I can scarcely remember, but I do not think I loved her; I stood in too great awe of her."

Mrs. Brandon had listened with eagerness painful in its intensity, but she was compelled to preserve an appearance of indifference, knowing well how erratic her young informer was. She might at any moment dart off at a tangent, and never be led back to the subject. Therefore she said, with well-assumed carelessness,

"I am surprised to hear you say *cruel*, my love."

"But I remember her being cruel to me, putting me from her with bitter words, and as though hating, from her heart of hearts, to have me near her. Don't you call that cruelty? And I also remember a dreadful scene with papa, and yet I sometimes think *not* with papa, but there is a dim uncertainty about this I never can get right; I do believe my memory becomes more and more indistinct the older I grow."

"Naturally; you are further removed from the pictures of your youth."

"I suppose that is it. And speaking of pictures, the set-out was all about a picture, the miniature of a fair-haired, lovely girl mamma one day caught papa looking at over his desk, and she was so angry, and there were such cutting words interchanged, I have never forgotten the affair."

"Of course you do not recollect the name of the young lady whom the picture represented?" The pale woman hunted all over her work-basket for a button.

"I recollect, because mamma taunted papa, and went on at him until he hurled the name at her, as it were."

"And it was—"

Mrs. Brandon's eagerness got the better of her policy, and defeated itself.

"And it was—no business of Mrs. Brandon's!" exclaimed the provoking girl, with a merry laugh. "But I'll just tell you the initials, because that won't matter, you know; they were—*E. T.*"

Lena idled into the garden; Mrs. Brandon wrote *E. T.* upon her tablet.

"Ella Travers!" sang Lena, seating herself in her favorite cavity under shade of shrubs and trees, and dangling one hand over the cliff's edge on trail for wild flowers.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN THEY THOUGHT MAD.

Romantic is the only word conveying the experience in the curious, the eccentric, and the pathetic which certain parishes afford the student of human life. The minister is a privileged person. Possessed of tact and courteous gentleness, he may penetrate where no other dares to follow, regions practically sealed to all but himself and the doctor. His questions are not commonly regarded as intrusive, and as a rule his appearance is not greeted with the frowns and bearishness of manner some people represent.

In a tolerably varied visiting experience over a thickly populated area comprising all classes, from the lesser trades-people down to the utterly destitute, Westley Garland had met with every possible kind of reception, and every describable and indescribable type of character, the records of which were as significant as the deepest of poetic dramas.

Such study imparts a curious review of life—almost a grotesque pageant of human nature. Sermons are not as eloquent and not so convincing as are such unvarnished records. Homilies unspoken and unwritten lie broadcast in the parish, and this is the largest library of divinity in the world. The parish may be a world in itself. The chronicle of one house is more enthralling sometimes than the most absorbing of fictions. The history of a terrace is a panorama of all human joys and woes. The mature experience of a street may teach a man more than he will learn in all the remainder of the universe. A year's labor in devious City ways is fraught with quiet yet strong expression, and intimate acquaintance with idiosyncrasy and physiology, with eccentricity and the singular.

With the exception of Lady Guilmere—an old friend, as he explained to his curate, the Rev. Spencer Webb—Mr. Garland did not visit the houses of the wealthy. No, his pastoral out-of-doors service was conferred solely upon those who had nothing but bare thanks to offer in return, and very often he departed without any thanks at all.

One narrow street was especially interesting to him, for sake of one house and the tenant of one room in that house. Look in upon this:

An elderly man seated at a table eating his lunch, the table-cloth is an opened newspaper—an ancient *Morning Post;* the luncheon consists of a sandwich, salt, bread, and water: a Champagne glass, and a ginger-beer bottle filled with some liquid which he shakes lustily to impart to it an appearance of effervescence. The table is deal, the floor bare, the whole place desolate and comfortless; yet to see the man you would suppose him seated in a prince's chamber before a board purveyed with plenty. He is an elderly, aristocratic man, in a coat that might have been black-leaded, so worn to a shiny iron-gray is that garment; but the hand below the frayed sleeve is white as hand can be; over it a cuff he had himself washed out that morning, and dried in the sun before dressing for lunch. He is scrupulously exact in his toilet, scrupulously exact in his luncheon and dining hours, severally fixed at two and seven o'clock, the dinner consisting as a rule of a sausage and a potato. Before dinner he orders James to ring the bell and summon his guests: he is James, his guests are imaginary; the bell—an old dustman's bell he had bought for a few half-pence—hangs to a nail by a piece of string, and the clatter it makes when James rings for dinner causes the old landlady to mutter a volley of threats against the poor crack-brained lodger; for of course he is mad to the vulgar. One vulgar person never calls another vulgar person mad; it is always somebody better off, somebody disposed to be eccentric; to be called mad is a satisfaction generally, it is a testimony to the uncommon, and in most cases to the superior. This person, like many another, regards it as a distinction, and will not in any case allow it to interfere with the imperturbable good temper which induces him to make the best of every thing. In his cuffs gleam a pair of studs, the fair value of which may be one penny, yet he lightly pushes them into position, with the pleasant remark—"Must change these for diamonds to-morrow; the worst of gold is it gets in one's way so!" Another time he complains of the jingling noise they make against the plate (he is eating off a piece of paper with a pocket-knife). Every now and then he will address the servant supposed to be standing behind his chair, possibly to censure the wine-merchant regarding the vintage of the Champagne, holding up the ginger-beer bottle with evident displeasure, a truly humorous twinkle in his eye nevertheless. And while he and his guests are helped to the most luxurious fare procurable upon the continent of Europe, there is no disgust on account of the frugality and destitution around him, which indeed he succeeds in losing sight of altogether beneath the illusion in which he himself enshrouds it.

This is Mr. Dickson Cheffinger; a gentleman in reduced circumstances, the presumptive heir to a baronetcy, and at this time without a friend in the world, save and except the clergyman from the imposing-looking church near by, who, with the affable tact peculiar to him, humors the craze of the poor gentleman, and never calls without leaving some delicate souvenir of his visit. And Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, who would have received a visit from her Majesty as an honor, but quite as a matter of course, gives truly noble reception to this distinguished guest. James is dispatched hither and thither, and frisks about regardless of dignity, in the endeavor to please his master and do justice to the importance of the visitor. All the aristocratic and noble ones staying in the house at the time are privately acquainted by James, directed by his master, of this addition to their number. The elaborately carved oak guest-chair, in which King Charles was wont to sit (it had been a rush-bottomed kitchen chair, but the rushes were now conspicuous by their absence), is placed before the gentleman with much ceremony and apology for the tarnished state of its trappings. "It is an heir-loom," says Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, "and the nobility of England have sat therein for centuries." Altogether, the Rev. Westley Garland's pastoral visit to Dickson Cheffinger, Esq., is about as painful as it is humorous, and as speculative as can be desired. The place is so dirty outside and in, and the gentleman's landlady so formidable, that nobody else ventures to enter; and although concealing the fact, Mr. Cheffinger looks longingly for these visits, which are as glimpses of sunshine in his clouded life.

No one cared to think upon the subject, but had they done so, curiosity might have been aroused as to Mr. Cheffinger's mode of gaining a living; he was never seen to do any work, and never known to have any money. The house was occupied by very poor people, and Mr. Dickson Cheffinger was undoubtedly the poorest of them all; yet, singularly enough, he was invariably happy, busying himself from morning till night with the noble and illustrious guests supposed to be thronging his reception-rooms.

It was a harmless deception, and perhaps did good, for it drove away dull care, and banished the ever-present shadow of gaunt poverty. Sometimes Mr. Cheffinger went out, and upon these occasions he passed down the stairs, along the passage, and out at the door, without observing the disreputable condition of the floor and walls, or noticing the rude discourse, right and left, often at his expense. Upon one occasion, when a churl jostled roughly against him, he corrected in so quietly polite a manner the treatment was never repeated. True the coarse Sussex workman was not a little astonished at being addressed in this fashion, "Your lordship would seem to forget the courtesy due to me extends as far as the entrance hall," and probably regarded the poor mad gentleman as entitled to be treated with civility if not with deference, for it was patent to all that he had seen better days, and that if he was mad it was misfortune had turned his brain, which Westley Garland was one to doubt. He had small faith in that *ignis fatuus* of a baronetcy which haunted the poor gentleman, or in the half-kind complainings against those who were keeping him out of his title, wealth, and honors; but he had implicit faith in the antecedents of culture and inbred *bonhomie* which supported him under the various phases of his poverty. And Dickson Cheffinger was very grateful for this confidence, and would have served his friend in any way.

"It is no joke, Mr. Garland," he said one day, "for a man and a nobleman entitled to twenty thousand a year to be placed in so questionable a position. The Duke of Cambridge was here to dinner last evening, and I candidly asked the opinion of his Royal Highness upon my claims, and if he could not introduce the subject to her Majesty. He could not do that, he said; but had no doubt, giving me the benefit of his private advice, that upon the death of the present representative—quite an old man, my dear Mr. Garland—I should certainly acquire possession."

"And so you will, my dear Sir, all in good time. These things are not to be hurried; the chief point is to be happy and contented in the state we immediately occupy."

Whereupon Mr. Cheffinger had seized his hand, exclaiming, "And I am, Sir, supported by Providence. And my good friends—you wonder where they have run away to—dressing for lunch; as I live, it is time! James, ring the bell. A cold collation, Mr. Garland, but you will stop, Sir; our friends will be so charmed to meet you?"

Mr. Garland had known trouble himself, and, although it had taken a different effect upon him, he could sympathize with the innocent eccentricity of this fellow-creature. He invariably preserved his gravity, was always tenderly considerate, and furnished the board with all above those common necessaries it ever contained. As often happens, Mr. Cheffinger's weakness was better, far better, known distant miles away, where, perhaps, it had more interest; the occupiers of the obscure little street and common lodging-house were content to leave it at peace, so many odd twistings of character come under the notice of the very poor.

One evening Mr. Garland walked in quietly and without ceremony, as was his custom: the poor gentleman was intently studying the only book he possessed, a torn and faded *Burke's Peerage.*

"Good-evening, Sir Dickson," said the Minister, with a frank and genial smile; "how are you?"

"Very well, thanking you much. Indeed, I may say, never better. Cavendish was here this morning. 'Bless my soul,' said he, 'how well you're looking, Cheffinger; mean to outlive it, I can see!' 'Indeed I do, my dear Duke,' I replied, and he quaffed my health in Champagne there and then" (pointing to the ginger-beer bottle on the grimy mantel). "Going down the stairs he knocked against the Duke of Richmond. 'Why, here's this fellow,' I heard him say, 'we all thought going quietly off, as lively as a fighting-cock!' Not elegant, Mr. Garland, but I distinctly heard it on the stairs."

"These dukes know you are of an enduring sort, Mr. Cheffinger."

The poor gentleman laid his hand with grave earnestness upon the other's arm, and said,

"If you do not believe me to be *Sir* Dickson, why call me so? If you do believe it, why not keep to the title? None are here to gibe at the honor you concede by right."

"Call not this man mad!" said Westley Garland to himself; adding aloud, "I come to make a proposal, which it may give you pleasure to accept, and do me service in return."

The impoverished man was alert in an instant.

"If I could but serve you, do tell me how. Is it for the Church? My friends, I am convinced, will interest themselves. I expect the Bishop of Chichester here very shortly; do let me put the matter before him."

"Many thanks; no. Nothing in that way. I will explain. You told me once you knew Devon. I think you said yours was a Devonshire family?"

"It is true; dear old Devon! Somebody from Torquay was here last evening, but I forget who; I know I recognized the features."

"I was going to ask if you remember an estate that was known, before its sale to the present proprietors, and may be now, for all I know, as Eagle Hall?"

"By name and sight well. Let me see—who the dickens lived at the Hall? Lord—Lord—who?"

"Mr. Lionel Travers—he was my college friend; he met with serious reverses and great misfortune. I was desirous of befriending his family, but was prevented; and upon instituting inquiries I ascertained they had mysteriously disappeared from the neighborhood. I fear they are wandering, and in trouble. Do—you—think—with—a—well-furnished—purse—you—could—discover—their—whereabouts—and—without informing them from whence comes the relief—so—help—them—as—to—place—mother and child—beyond the reach of—of want? Can you do this, Sir Dickson? If you will, I will spare no exertion to see *you* placed in possession of your own!"

Thin and white, hungry and exhausted, yet with a spirit debonair and fresh as untarnished silver, the poor gentleman started to his feet, thrilled by chivalry and gratitude, and fired with enthusiasm.

"Without any reward I would seek them out for you, Sir; and I will find them, I will find them! James shall pack my portmanteau instantly. I will leave a note informing the earl I am unable to keep an engagement; but he may come before I leave. How happy I feel that you are placing it in my power to do you some little service! I've a lot of people staying in the house; surely they won't delay me in any way; they did speak of the South Devon Hunt only last evening. I have it—I'll not tell them I'm going; the earl, for instance, is an awful chatter-box—I have a decided impression he is. I'll not say a word to him; and by the spotless ermine, I hear his footstep on the stair. I thought he'd come!"

True enough, a heavy and aristocratic step was heard slowly ascending; and, thinking it might be the landlord, Mr. Garland thrust a well-filled purse upon his ambassador (who concealed it in the breast-pocket of his coat, a dress-coat, by-the-way), and prepared to depart. After taking a cordial leave, he was throwing open the door, when the earl stepped into the room, in the form and person of that startling genius Mr. Noel Barnard. The Minister flushed to the temples, staggered for the instant, then coldly continued his way; the secretary watching to the last receding glimpse of his form, with that strange expression ever characterizing his heed of Westley Garland. One would have thought these two held some terrible secret in common.

Apparently the new visitor did not prepossess Mr. Cheffinger, who looked him hard in the face, and asked,

"Are you a doctor?" Somebody had once promised to send a doctor of lunacy to Mr. Cheffinger, by way of threat, and he had never forgotten it. One countenance more objectionable than another, one form more burly, and it was immediately identified with that doctor.

"No!" replied the visitor, "I'm not, and I shouldn't like to be! I'm a solicitor, Sir Dickson, and I've the pleasure of speaking to my client, whom I hope soon to be able to introduce to the world *in propria persona.* Shake hands, Sir Dickson!"

Sir Dickson shook hands, looking very bewildered, and asking,

"Is there, then, any fresh news—any compromise proposed—any—any death?"

"Calm yourself, Sir Dickson; nothing is yet settled, we await a little assistance of your own. But tell me—the gentleman who has just gone out—I was not aware you were already suited with a legal adviser?"

"Bless me, no; the Lord Chancellor was saying he would recommend one to me—but I am not suited: I thought it premature, I thought it premature; but don't stand. James, take the gentleman's hat—where on earth's my man gone to? Allow me!" And with the gallantry of an earlier school, the poor man, James not being available, himself placed the hat upon a shelf.

Mr. Barnard watched the operation with much interest.

"You've a charming little room here, Sir Dickson!"

Sir Dickson did not know what to say, and spread the newspaper over the back of King Charles's chair for an antimacassar.

"Yet we all like a change," he continued, "and I doubt not, Sir Dickson, a little tour would be very agreeable. Like all gentlemen who possess taste—you are fond of travel, eh?"

"I am, even now, contemplating a somewhat long journey, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Noel Barnard, Sir, of the firm *Barnard and O'Connor, Chancery Chambers, Cursitor Street.*"

"And I believe my man must be packing. So sorry I can not offer you a glass of claret!"

"Thank you, I never take it; but to business. Grant me permission to lay a few facts before you relative to this long-disputed cause. You are, or believe yourself to be, entitled to the baronetcy, estates, and moneys of CHEFFINGER, valued at some twenty thousand pounds per annum, in round numbers; the same being at this present enjoyed by your remote cousin, whom you hold to be an illegal representative. Is this not so, Sir Dickson?"

"Precisely as I put it to his Highness the other evening."

The solicitor, to whom Highnesses were very small game, smiled graciously, and continued:

"I have been for some time actively engaged in investigating the case for you, and my respected partner and myself were in possession of some valuable documents effectually substantiating your claims, and which, upon completion, we contemplated having the pleasure of laying before you; but I regret to say these have mysteriously disappeared."

"Disappeared!" Starting to his feet, with clinched hands and a blank expression of countenance, Mr. Cheffinger slowly realized the effect that disappearance indicated; then he murmured something about a clew.

"Yes, we have a clew. A lad of unusual intelligence, recently articled to our firm, has decamped from a branch office, taking many valuable papers with him. His intention, no doubt, is to set forth in ostensible search for the heir-at-law, but he will sell his priceless freightage to the present occupier for a mere song. We desire to be beforehand, and intercept the nefarious transaction. This boy should be tracked, and compelled to hand over the papers to yourself or to us. Are you content, all expenses being paid, to follow in pursuit of this lad, and to telegraph our firm the instant you discover him? You understand, we might place this matter in the hands of the police; but it involves so much explanation and publicity, all of which would be fatal to our cause, and might be prejudicial to your interests. We prefer availing ourselves of your services, if you are willing to interest yourself. Of course, Sir Dickson," added the solicitor, carelessly, "it is immaterial to the firm, as we can very readily obtain professional assistance, and it is quite unusual for a legal representative to repose this confidence in a client; admitting him, as it were, my dear Sir Dickson, behind the scenes—taking him, in fact, into a quiet partnership." And the solicitor's face appeared so illumined by frank and hearty honesty, poor Sir Dickson, scarcely knowing whether he was upon his head or his heels, consented at once, and received a second purse of gold, without knowing what to do with either. The sacred and fine old English rights of hospitality triumphed, and he proposed, with great self-possession, when his visitor rose to depart,

"May I beg you will remain and share some slight refreshment? I am alone this evening, and shall feel honored by your company."

"Thank you, Sir Dickson, I have so much business in hand, or I would gladly accept your invitation. I have to be in half a dozen different places, at as many different points of the compass, between this and midnight. And now adieu; my best wishes accompany you upon this mission of delicacy—a mission I am sure no person could execute with more tact and prudence than yourself. By-the-way—I had almost forgotten, and the firm looks to me for all responsible work—it becomes necessary, in an exceptional matter of this kind, for you to sign an agreement conferring certain powers upon the legal representatives, without which, in fact, they can perform no satisfactory work. This is simply a form. You will sign this, of course, Sir Dickson?"

Saying which, the diplomatist unfolded a lengthy document, and spread it upon the table. The poor suitor scarcely looked at it. He would have thought it dishonor to doubt so honest-spoken a gentleman. With a hand that trembled slightly with agitation—the poor wasted form being any thing but strong—he took up an old greasy pen, fumbled about for a half-dry penny bottle of ink, and prepared to sign, when Mr. Noel Barnard interposed, in a gently business-like manner,

"One moment! We must have a witness or two."

"My friends, Lords—"

The solicitor interrupted him a little impatiently,

"Some one in the house."

"They are in the house, in the billiard-room. James will summon them to this conference."

Mr. Noel Barnard was turning very red in the face, when a knock at the door startled them. It was followed by the re-entrance of the Rev. Westley Garland, who explained that he had forgotten one of his gloves, and, stooping down by the table at the foot of the exposed document, picked up the said glove with polite assurance.

"Here," said the man they thought mad, laying his thin hand reverently upon the clergyman's arm—"here is the best witness we can have."

And the Minister nodded coolly, yet withal pleasantly; but brought a hand down like a sledge-hammer when Noel Barnard attempted to remove the paper.

"My turn now, Mr. Secretary Barnard!" He seized the paper, and looked it over with the cynical comment, "Very pretty; a nice arrangement for Cheffinger!" That gentleman being considerably astonished at the new part played by his friend, Mr. Garland remarked, "No one should execute a document without having it previously read over to him and explained." And the calm, sad eyes sought out those of Mephistopheles, who, not abashed, stood with one hand folded firm upon the table, erect and haughty as some ancient ruler of provinces, and looking back the glance with the composed defiance of conscious power.

"There is so much of this," said Mr. Garland, wearily, "if you do not mind, I will take it home to study?"—addressed to Dickson Cheffinger, who of course assenting, the Minister leisurely folded it for consignment to his pocket. Then Noel Barnard angrily insisted upon objecting to the breach of courtesy involved, and the Minister turned upon him with decision.

"The document shall remain in my custody for the present, Sir, and until Mr. Cheffinger thoroughly realizes its purport."

"Mr.—he calls me Mr. again," murmured the subject of all this solicitude.

"And now, Sir," continued Westley Garland, "having settled our business here, we may as well go, for I can see Mr. Cheffinger is fatigued."

Saying which, and shaking hands with the poor gentleman, he stood by the open door waiting for Mr. Barnard to pass.

"Good-evening, Sir Dickson," said that tactician, with consummate homage—"good-evening, and rest assured, despite the treatment I have personally received, and the affront upon our firm, we shall not lose sight of your interests; in which, of course, you will give us your esteemed assistance." And with a meaning look and warm clasp of the hand, the gentleman with Australian and other testimonials passed out, bowing sweetly to Mr. Garland, who, following, saw him well away from the house and down the street.

Left alone, poor Dickson Cheffinger seated himself in the chair of King Charles, placed the two purses upon the table before him, and stared at them with blank bewilderment. Which to serve first? Not being selfish, he thought it well to serve his friend before himself. But then the stranger had addressed him as "Sir Dickson Cheffinger," and the title was very dear to him; and was not the gentleman striving in and for his (Cheffinger's) interests; and had he not waited so long, so very long, for this day? Then arose a yearning to see once more his native county. He should go straight to Devon to serve his friend, and step by step trace out those in whom he was so interested. Again, how discover the lad for the solicitor, without name or description? Surely these would be in the purse? He looked. Yes! A folded paper, with a full description in neatly written characters, and the name of *Walter Gordon.*

"My friends will wonder at my absence," said he, half sadly, looking round his bare home, and dreading the idea of turning out upon the wide waste men call the world. True he had money, but then he was so helpless compared with those strong and resolute ones he saw abroad; and he would feel lonely without the lords and earls and dukes, his constant companions and intimate associates; he must leave all these behind, but then it was to meet them all on happier ground—perhaps at CHEFFINGER, the dream of forty years! A fair smile played away the wrinkled care-lines; he stood up a boy again, and more man than for a long decade.

"James," called Mr. Cheffinger to that nonentity his valet, "begin to pack; we start to-morrow morning early."

Then James, in the person of Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, began to pack. It was not a long operation. A brass stud—upon which Mr. Cheffinger gazed musingly—"It is not as handsome as it used to be, but when and where I dropped the diamonds is more than I can unriddle!" A pair of paper cuffs, a collar, a pair of carpet slippers, from which the pattern had long since vanished, and the faded *Peerage.*

Having packed, he proceeded to settle some outstanding accounts, which early that morning had been a sore burden to the impoverished lodger. He felt very rich and very honored now, and he stole down to the shore, to the calm gray line of sea, with its border of golden cloud to the west; and standing upon half a life and half a world, sought to trace the issue of his quest upon the fleeting light and deepening shadow.

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CHAPTER XXI.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

"How peaceful!" murmured Lena.

"It is peace before conflict."

Mrs. Brandon had stolen upon her unobserved. Lena looked up quickly; she had been lost in one of those reveries in which she at times indulged.

"I mean that we shall have a storm—do you not feel it, do you not see it?"

"Neither. Whatever will the yacht do?"

"They will not fear," said Mrs. Brandon; "the Yorkshire fishermen are familiar with these waters, and the coast, though dangerous, is well known."

"It seems so sad that storm should follow upon calm—"

"The principle is invariably balanced by calm following upon storm."

"Yes, but what wreck and loss may happen during the interval of storm."

"True, yet life is thus ordained. Take, for instance, a young girl who has lived for years contented and happy with those constituting the circle of her childhood's home: the day comes when she is dissatisfied with this, and longs for what every female heart hungers for—some one to love and to love her; then sets in the time of disquiet and unrest, which you may call the storm-time if you like, and this continues until the time of discovering and discovery, when she first finds one whom she feels capable of loving, and whom she fondly deems capable of loving her. Around this same her fancy should wreathe beauty, her tenderness weave ideality; of her imagery she should create a hero, upon her hero bestow nobility, court of that nobility its utmost sympathy, yield to that sympathy her fullest, freshest reserve of love."

While the woman thus insinuatingly ingrafted the pain of St. Aubyn, the owner of the yacht had laid aside his cigar and book, and, rising from a comfortable-looking chair, he pointed his glass for a leisurely inspection of the citadel. He saw a tiny hand trifling with the blue bloom fringing the cliff, and above this the most lovable of little faces conceivable.

"But then she may have freckles, come to get close," muttered the philosophic yachtsman, adapting a clearer focus—"sure to have freckles, always roaming about that garden."

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon, I can see him now! Isn't he just like Byron's Corsair?"

Mrs. Brandon had been out of sight; she leaned a little forward, remarking,

"He seems a handsome young man, upon my word!"

"The devil!" muttered the yachtsman, catching a glimpse of the black and white duenna. Lena did not trouble herself to alter her indolent position; she was fond of watching these craft by sunset. It was a picture that not alone relieved the monotony of the expanse, but fed those dreamy reveries, her sometime pleasure, not yet a pain. And the companion, taking advantage of her opportunity, resumed her tuition:

"Unless the person you may be talking with experiences the same feeling, you can not describe this first budding of love in the bosom of girlhood; but, my dearest Lena, if you were allowed to mix more in the world and come in contact with people, you would quickly understand for yourself, and from that moment a new era in your history would commence. In the great world of Society your beauty would gain for you a hundred suitors; old and young would incline to catch the favor of your smile; titles and honors would be playthings for your sport at will; hours would be but as winged minutes, golden dreams of perfume, music, and song; all your life would be changed, your whole soul be thrilled, because you would love—*you would love!*"

Dulcet as the serpent of Eden, the voice of the speaker and the spell of her words exercised a fascinating influence. The girl listened, overcome in spite of herself, and, suddenly starting up, stood before the woman, erect, panting, flushed with pride and pleasure, and holding a hand forth in the direction of that solitary figure the sun was painting glorious as some Homeric creation, she cried,

"I love—love him!"

"I thought you did, my dear," quietly remarked the black and white, plucking a root of grass apart, blade by blade, and looking with motherly interest for the first time upon the innocent being she was thus treacherously making wise.

The yacht was much closer to the shore, and William Arden could be distinguished more plainly than before, and he in turn could define the cliff and its occupant with tempting accuracy—risking the freckles. When he saw the action described, his imagination at once interpreted it in his own favor, and he accepted the sign as an invitation. This lovely and unfortunate girl was unhappy, most miserable, unutterably wretched, imprisoned upon this huge beetling crag in a castellated dwelling by a stern parent of the Richardson's Show order of the parental, and she plainly appealed to him for deliverance. All the Knights of the Red Cross, with Don Quixote and the Champions thrown in, should not surpass his efforts of valor in her behalf.

"I don't want to get myself into a mess, and I ought to be in London by the end of term. Being friends of my father's makes it awkward too; but a fellow can't go and leave a girl languishing like that. I'm rather afraid of the old woman; if I only had her on my side now!"

As though in answer to his wish, there was seen this: the younger lady was walking slowly away toward the house, while the elder waved a pocket handkerchief in the direction of himself, and by this he knew her to be upon his side. So, turning to his faithful purser, he gave orders:

"Brown, open me a bottle of Champagne!"

He thought he deserved a little stimulant before he decided upon his plan of action.

"Wind's rising, Mr. William!" and with weather-wise cautiousness Brown indicated an extra rippling of the water, a keener cutting of the billows. "Better put out to sea, I think. These rocks are as jagged and uneven as a shark's teeth!"

"No, no, Brown; I've set my mind upon anchoring here for the night, and the night it shall be. So quaff a goblet, old man, to—well, to success!"

But stanch Yorkshire Brown shook his head, and would have none of it. If they both got muddled, where might their boat be in the morning? So the weather-beaten old fisherman contented himself with refilling his pipe.

It was while engaged upon this necessary office, an anxious glance bent upon the ominous line of rocks, the old man suddenly pocketed his pipe, and, pointing to an irregular ledge traversing the face of the wall like a rift seam, he muttered, "That's it agen; I can see it moving, and this time I could swear to it. That's a man; he is crawling along the ledge, and the water is rising upon him!"

"Well, Brown, you know what to do," said William Arden, sitting down in his easy-chair, and taking off a pair of exquisitely worked slippers. And while his skipper was preparing for running their little vessel nearer in shore, with many a shake of the head at the untoward and untimely nature of the act, William Arden removed his jacket, ready, if need be, to breast the surf for the saving of that fellow-being's life, but leisurely sitting down again to his cigar until such time as his services might be required, and with all his thought intent upon the lovely child of the cliff. Taking up his violin, his invariable *compagnon de voyage*, he indulged in one of those sweet and plaintive serenades of Gascony which, but for its faultless rendering, would, under the circumstances, have appeared grotesque. The ladies heard the melody, and returned to the edge of the rock, and there the elder, bending over with a nerve characteristic of the woman, discovered that solitary figure clinging to the ledge, and understood at a glance their scheme of rescue. Then with a smile of satisfaction she gave her arm to the girl.

"Come, my dear, let us go in; it is getting damp, and you know how particular your papa is!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"LAUREL IS GREEN FOR A SEASON."

In turning her back upon the roseate picture, Lena seemed to have lost all the spirit and vivacity that up to that time had distinguished her treatment of the companion. She walked in the direction of the house, past shadowy shrubs and clumped masses of light and shade, her face pale and thoughtful. She seemed to have suddenly crossed the border-line dividing the delicate periods of girlhood and maidenhood.

They went into the same room, and by Lena's whispered wish the lady did not ring for lights. They sat upon low couches by the window, Lena watching the one star in sight, and, as it became brighter, the shadows deepening below.

"I thought we would talk a little while, dear!" Lena was like some fluttering and tremulous bird now, and her gentleness had something imploring and supplicating about it. The woman noticed this, but she was not touched; her face bore an expression of grim content.

When upon the cliff, in the sunset, the girl's heart had throbbed as with fire, and her blood burned fiercely; her eyelids had seemed overweighted with flowers of the crimson hour, and the sudden thrill of that new-found excitement mounted to her temples, crept about the white throat, and nestled there like an adder of red-hot gold. But now she felt cold and frightened, wishing yet unable to root out these new, strange thoughts; yearning for some confidence and counsel. And only this sardonic woman, her worst foe, to talk to. Truly might the wind moan in the trees, and the blue arch above look sombre, for it is the most heinous spectacle earth ever witnesses, where a designing and crafty woman undertakes the spoiling of an ingenuous, innocent girl.

"Yes, we will talk a little while, my child." Mrs. Brandon placed her arm around the slim form beside her. She understood very well it was herself to talk; yes, she would talk.

"Lena, you are by this time quite old enough to know what the world is made of, to know that there is evil as well as good. Your papa would never acquaint you with all that it is necessary you should know, because it is to his interest to keep you in ignorance of very much that is going on in this world, of which you know comparatively nothing. You have to learn that men and women are not children in a nursery, that beauty is valuable, that a girl possessed of your altogether exceptional beauty has no right to be confined as you are. You must withdraw yourself firmly from this thralldom, and demand your liberty; only, of course, do not allude to my disinterested sympathy: for if I found myself in any difficulty through helping and advising you, I could not conscientiously befriend you again, as I consider I am now doing. Your papa is injuring both you and himself by thus secluding you from all society save that of old Mr. Arden, the clergyman. Why, what would you be fit for, should any thing happen to Mr. St. Aubyn? You could not manage his property and estates, utterly devoid of experience. You could not go forth into the world, because it would be as a labyrinth enveloped in mystery. You could not face the other sex, or ours. And suppose nothing ever did happen to Mr. St. Aubyn, of what use is it cooping and caging you up here all your life? Does your papa suppose—is he so selfish as to suppose—you will remain like this all your life; that you will never experience a yearning for freedom, and desire for other company than his own? You have yet to live out the grand passion, and after that, if you can remain content with your present home, my name is not Hortense Brandon. You have to drink of that intoxicating draught which woman spends one part of her life looking forward to, and the other part in looking back upon—that blissful time when she feels that one at least in the world is her slave; that there is one will imperil life for her, bend to her exacting will, fathom her unspoken wish; one whose happiness depends upon her treatment, who will lay at her feet honors and wealth, who lives but by her consent. Ah! my child, you are ignorant of the rapture attending such dominion, when a true heart is yours to wear at your watch-chain, to play with, to sport in company, to tease and to torment, to cajole or disdain at pleasure; and, when you are tired, to throw away, or *break;* if you are minded to know what it is made of—"

"I shouldn't want to know what it was made of, so long as I knew it to be all my own."

"Ah, very pretty; now I like you for that answer; you are again my own wise little woman, all good sense and judgment, and you quite agree with all that I have been saying to you?"

"I listen—to agree comes afterward."

"And in that careful speech I trace your thoughts, my child; such things need weighing well. But remember, your books will not impart a knowledge of the world: believe me, you must mix with society for true wisdom, and go to your books for dreams; you may often glean more from half an hour's conversation than a whole volume will impart, and discover finer language in an eye than all the eloquence of your poets can put into print."

Lena sat with clasped hands, thinking intently; her eyes fixed upon the bright star that played hide-and-seek with the clouds flitting restlessly across the sky, and she felt altogether unhappy. Every word the cunning Mentor had spoken, and the subtle significance of tone, more stealthy even than the words, had sunk deeply into her heart. And it was of St. Aubyn that heart was full, for the girl was far from being wholly selfish. It would take many such lessons of the type delivered that evening before she voluntarily wounded that tender and loving being.

"I could never be happy again if I left papa."

"I do not doubt that he has taken care to implant that precious notion above all others; but what if papa should leave his Lena?"

"Such a thing could never happen, Mrs. Brandon! Were it to, I should feel it my duty to remain patient until his return."

All was silent in the room; without, upon the surface of the garden, the breeze freshened, stirring the flowers from sleeping, and rustling the leaves of the copper-colored trees. Below, at base of the cliff, the waves broke with dull, uneasy, restless impatience, as though rebellious at being held in leash; and, when they smote upon the wall of rock and fell back cowered, rose again with redoubled fury. The wind scoured the garden paths with autumnal vindictiveness; some drops of rain fell, and the shadows marshaled their gloomy ranks with the magnificent discipline of the war-time of the elements. The girl felt depressed; it was the reaction and the operation of atmospheric change upon her sensitively organized frame.

"I will go in and say good-night to papa, and be off to bed, Mrs. Brandon, for my head aches."

"It is very oppressive!" Mrs. Brandon rose to close the window; a swift gleam of lightning played upon the pale woman without her shrinking; nay, she smiled to it cheerfully; a roll of thunder with its terrific echo rattled upon the cliff, and seemed to rend it to its base.

Shrinkingly, Lena hid herself within the thick folds of the window-curtain until the reverberation ceased.

"I thought we should have it!" and the companion pulled the hearth-rug over the fire-irons, and leisurely rolled some plain needle-work round her knitting-pins.

"Good-night, my love"—opening the door for Lena—"I will send Mary to you, and let her bring that white dress to my room; I will run the edging in as I promised. Good-night."

Outside they were somewhat surprised to discover Martha Saxe, the cook and housekeeper. She was standing very close to the door, and at once explained, while dropping a courtesy, that she did not know the ladies were there, and was coming in to close the window, because of the rain.

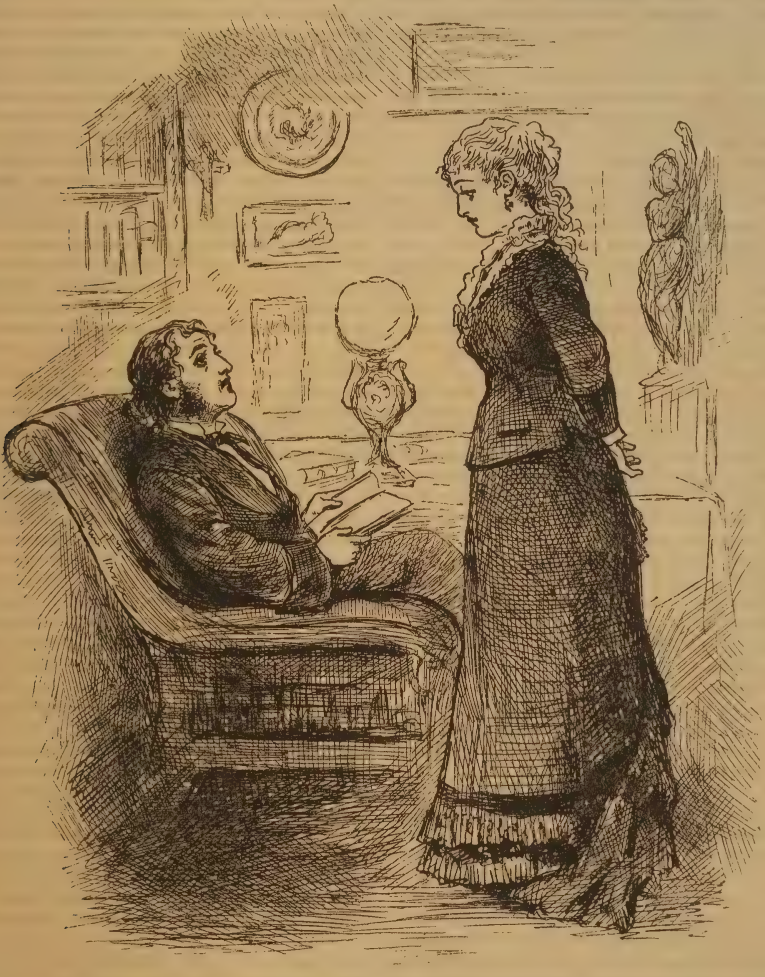
Hortense Brandon's eyes rested upon the woman; she felt that every word she had spoken had been overheard. Enemies to the death these two, they understood each other; but a marked difference existed in their regard for St. Aubyn's daughter, whom Martha loved with the dumb heroic faithfulness of a by-gone age.

The pale lady passed silently up the stairs, the trail of her black silk robe, sinuous, ebon sheen, seeming to coil after her like a retinue of jetty snakes.

Lena was near the first door of St. Aubyn's sanctum. Martha Saxe, who had followed, laid a hand, hard and big, but honest, upon the girl's.

"Dear Miss Lena, be careful with *her;* I'm sure she means you harm. Don't let her guide you in any one thing. Go only by what your papa says, and never do any thing without first asking his advice. Forgive this; it is for your sake; I mean well."

"Mrs. Saxe!" called the clear, ringing voice of the pale lady, while leaning over the balusters above, "may I trouble you to kindly ask Mary to be good enough to come to me a moment?"



"GOING TO BED, PAPA!"

"I hate her carnying ways," grumbled Martha Saxe, bustling off to comply, while Lena knocked lightly at the student's door.

"Come in, ladybird!" And as she entered he closed his book, and the proud face, set with thought, relaxed to its accustomed charming smile when with her.

"Going to bed, papa!" And she stood before him in that pretty attitude little girls assume when they propose something they fear may be questioned.

"So soon? Afraid of the lightning, darling?" He never liked her to retire before himself; it was the day's reward, his one choice *bonne bouche*, that hour before bedtime. They had had storms in plenty, summer after summer, winter after winter, but she had never wanted to go to bed before; on the contrary, she had flown to him nestling for protection, hiding her eyes upon his breast, his hands closed fast upon her ears. So he looked up with the quick apprehensiveness, the instant scrutiny, of those who live in the delicacy of private, unguessed, and unfathomed peril. And he repeated,

"So soon, Lena?"

"Yes, papa," with a playful, pitiful, half-sad, half-tender, and altogether lovely pouting of the rose-bud lips.

"What is the matter?"

"My head aches a little; but I feel wretched, papa!" and then the whilom high-spirited girl burst into tears. Seriously uneasy, St. Aubyn drew her to him, and wiped the tears away; and he felt that she was fluttering, and throbbing, and much agitated.

"Good gracious, Lena, my child, what is the matter? I never saw you like this before."

"Please, papa, I never was like it before."

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh, papa, I'm in love at last! And I don't like it, because it makes me unhappy, wanting to love you, and you alone."

St. Aubyn was taken aback by the *naïve* confession; then his face darkened, while he breathlessly asked,

"Do you fully understand the meaning of what you tell me, Lena?"

"Quite, papa. Are you very angry?"

Instead of replying, he lowered the shade over his reading-lamp, so that his face was not betrayed; then he asked, in a strangely cold and distinct tone of voice,

"And who is the new poet my little girl is in love with? what hero in our picture-books?"

"No, not this time, papa dear; it is *a real live one;* and I have been thinking of him by day and by night, and now I know this is called being in love."

More distinctly still he questioned the child, feeling the agony of wasted confidence, the grievous awakening from broken dreams.

"And how does my little girl know this?"

An appalling burst of thunder was the fitting accompaniment to her reply.

"Mrs. Brandon told me, papa."

Even from that inner chamber the tumult of the billows was plainly, fearfully distinguishable.

"But how can this be your experience, my child? you have seen no one, have never left our house."

"No, papa; and she says I ought to see and know something of the world by this time."

Mr. St. Aubyn's countenance wore an absolutely shocked and horrified expression.

"Mrs. Brandon seems to have exceeded her duties. Had I considered you required enlightening upon such subjects, I would have acquainted you with all that was necessary for you to know."

Lena lifted up her hands in pretty dismay.

"I remember, now, I was not to say a word about it to you; and yet Martha said, 'Always go by what your papa says, and never do any thing without first asking his advice.' Do you advise my loving somebody, papa?"

It was of his own fault that she was so ignorant, so innocent, so confiding, so helpless. Could he be angry with her, or feel otherwise than profoundly sad?

The corners of the room were all in deep shade, their sumptuous ornament hidden by gloom. Graven gold and bronzes, Sèvres, Dresden, and rare Continental fabric; Bow statuettes and Oriental vases, Chelsea and Worcester ware, delicate as dreams in sun-dawn; a gorgeous Buen Retiro, Louis XIV. ormolu-work, a superb Della Robbia relief, antique carving, grotesque fancies from the Japan Palace at Dresden, and some choice old Wedgwood. Old Lac cabinets, buhl tables and exquisite pedestals, bonbonnières and bijouterie; miniature marbles from Italy and ivories from China, classical marqueterie, Venetian paneling, cloisonné enamels, turquoise-work of Angoulême, Byzantine chasing in dead gems, cameos, intaglios; Bactrian Tetradrachms, and carvings in jade and agate. Egyptian, Rhodian, and Moorish ware; Capo di Monte and Vienna, Persian and Turkish porcelain; silver torchères, and a wealth of costly trifles colorless in the deep shade, their sumptuous ornament hidden in the gloom, even as one's sacred hopes and dimly lovely longings may be shrouded and made dark, robbed of the light-lending charm that had rendered them so fair.

Rising from his seat at the table, he led her over to the easy-chair in which she had usually found him at this peaceful time, right along the ten years' happiness, and, seating himself, he drew her toward him, away from the ottoman at his feet upon which she had endeavored to sink, tenderly raising her to his knee with the words,

"I have not much to say, my child, but I wish you to forget the past few years for a minute, and fancy yourself again the golden-haired darling who knew no greater joy or reward than coming to this chair for caresses."

He drew her head upon his breast, kissing her forehead reverently. She had been his lily girl. He could not bear to think of that throbbing heat which he was conscious crimsoned the snow-white brow as though dashed with the fierce glow of poppies.

"Many a time your head has thus leaned back to me, Lena; many a time have I passed my fingers through your curls in this way; and should I like your leaning thus to another, or another's hand to dally with these tresses? Ask yourself, my child. Golden flax to richer gold, and thence to golden brown, this fleece has changed during these ten years before my eyes with the splendor of a field of ripening grain, and is this to garland another's triumph? If it is the world you would see and learn as others do, and from which my chief happiness has been to preserve you, why, you may learn its hollowness and mockery under my preserving care. But hear first what this same world did for me in days gone by. A darkened history I have kept from you purposely—one of the histories, grim and tragic, arising out of the exactions of that pitiless Moloch—Society. I possessed the most beautiful wife it was possible for a gentleman of England to call his own, and for a time her whole love was mine. Society robbed me of both wife and child—just such another golden fairy as yourself. Yes, Lena, you are not my child! Deprived of those I loved with so exquisite and intense a passion, I found in you one to supply the place of her I loved the most, my child; the other was too deep a wound ever to heal. That is the wreck this world you covet wrought in my home. Now, knowing all my love for you, and how it has been the one joy of all these years, you will not ask me to advise you to love another? I should have kept this secret from you for some time yet, but you have forced its disclosure; yet for your candor and truth, painful as it is to me, I confess I am honestly grateful."

The disclosure broke upon her with startling abruptness, very much as might have done one of the great thunder volleys without. But she did not draw herself away, or feel to love him less. It was only strange to realize; and, truth to tell, she felt a little lighter-hearted than when St. Aubyn began his gentle talking, for she feared reproach; but when it proved that fonder language, she felt nearly overcome by emotion. And now she just turned upon him with renewed love, for such it was, blended with sympathy, and, twining her arms about him, she assured those greedy ears of her unalterable love.

Suddenly they both heard a cry—a heart-rending appeal as of some one *in articulo mortis*, and the master of the house upon the cliff, starting to his feet, listened intently.

"It is the yachtsmen," he said; "they fear striking upon the rock; there is no preventing it: but it may be possible to render assistance afterward."

He unbarred the window and looked forth. A great darkness was upon the face of the water, illumined by shifting gleams of lightning. Lena trembled, thinking of the yacht.

"We should help those poor men," she said.

St. Aubyn looked narrowly into the clear and truthful eyes, and he read nothing there but the natural solicitude one would expect from a sensitive and excited child.

"Retire to your chamber, pretty one; leave Williams and myself to do the best that can be done."

The frightened girl obeyed. St. Aubyn hastily summoned his servant, and ordered that lights should be placed at every window, and a large fire lighted on the cliff within view of those upon the sea.

It was one of those breathless moments which seem laden with peril, when the delay of an instant may be attended with disaster, and when one can scarcely move for apprehension and excitement.

Amidst the bustle Lena could not forget those most interested; imaginary pictures of the endangered yachtsman in every possible and impossible attitude of peril and dismay flashed before her with each lurid shaft of lightning, and culminated in a tableau of painful intensity at the moment a huge pillar of smoke, followed by a bright column of fire, rose from the beacon and lighted up the scene.

Like a castle in flames, the weird spectacle of some historic tragedy upon the border in the olden days, the mansion stood forth, every white stone reddened; while at the windows each waxen light blazed starry hope to those below.

It was another roseate picture, but not of the sunset; yet somehow fraught with more interest to her, her soul seeming to go forth with those flashes of light descending to the seething water, her heart seeming to leap with those bright tongues of flame; each gust of wind, fanning the fire, causing her to turn faint and pale. In the foreground the shadowy shrubs and clumped masses were like some barrier between her and the fire, all the surroundings gray, indistinct, and shapeless. The girl's heart, as once before that evening, throbbed, and her blood burned fiercely, mounted to her temples, crept about the white throat, and nestled there like an adder of red-hot gold, while her eyelids seemed overweighted with flowers of the crimson hour.

Meanwhile resignation prevailed upon the yacht; the canvas had been furled and all precaution taken. Brown, the experienced seaman of fifty years, had declared nothing could save them, they would be dashed full upon the sharp ridge of rock looming out of the black water, a corner every fisherman had avoided long before Ashton St. Aubyn built him a house upon the summit; and then the old seaman had raised that shout heard by the inmates of the mansion. William Arden took the sudden catastrophe with the fine aplomb characteristic of his class, and was prepared to breast the waves and chance a scramble with cool decisive bravery; he only said,

"If I go down, Brown, old fellow, give my love to my father. Tell him I should have taken high honors this term had I been spared."

He did not think of the beautiful girl who, like Lurline, had allured him to this peril; it was of his father he thought in the hour of extremity. Even the delight of being broken to pieces at the foot of the rock she lived upon did not strike this phlegmatic young man; he merely shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Helen again!" and straightway forgot her; to think of more serious things, such as preserving his silver-topped meerschaum, the gift of a college friend; his sketches and materials, and a choice Didot, his favorite volume when he courted the *dolce far niente.*

Brown, with the saturnine good humor of these rough amphibious philosophers, watched every violent upheaving of their frail cockle-shell with undisturbed serenity. Whether he was to be saved from the devouring element was a question of uncertainty troubling him not at all; but whether his young master was to be preserved became a more vital matter, and to effect this he would fight these fierce waters with all the energy left in his old limbs.

"Let me just put this round your body, girth-fashion, Mr. William; do now, Sir. And I'll stay aboard with the end of it until you're safely landed," pleaded the honest fellow, tenderly, and as solicitously as though the young man had been his own son. It was a slim yet strong rope, the loop of which he had softened by means of a length of canvas. Touched by this regard, William took his hand and pressed it hastily, while kindly declining.

"No, old friend, I shall be better unimpeded, and must take my chance as any other; we will strike out both together, and God help us! But if I only escape, owing to my youth and strength, I will be a good friend to the wife and children; so don't let that trouble you, Brown."

"It doesn't, Sir; I've commended 'em to Higher hands so many times afore, I safely leave 'em now."

At that moment a bright gleam flamed upon the cliff and shone upon the sea, and light after light appeared at those tiers of windows high above their heads, and it was like hope speaking out from the darkness of awful peril; it was like home awaiting tired, tempest-beset travellers.

"They are expecting us, you see," cried William Arden, cheerfully. Even while the storm drowned the reply, and the men's faces became fixed as though bared to eternity, the accelerated force of mighty billows, lashed to ungovernable fury, bore the vessel with a crash upon the rock, firm and cruel and white as a phalanx of steel. Only a miracle would have averted it, and they took their leap for life. A riven, splintered hulk fell back to the water, which tore in at the gap, victoriously rushing with frenzied glee over the dismantled citadel surrendered to the raging foe.

The men battled bravely, blinded with spray, beaten with foam; struggled with the heaving water, mounting and rearing above the billows, fighting with the cowardly surge that, soft as wool, enveloped them, breasting the pitiless, cutting edges of wide waves mowing all before them, shaking rain and salt from their faces and closed eyelids, lifting arms like men for mighty effort; and plunging forward with the strength of steeds in the thick of conflict for the hazardous, hopeless, misty rock shelving ahead of them. A giant wave, an ebon mountainous mass that smote them, and bore them asunder, hurled them upon an opposing mass, one other tremendous wave, and they were swept and rolled and dashed helpless and insensible upon a jagged and gnarled table abutting from the ledge of which mention has been made. And here they were laid and left as though the frantic waters, tired of their fury, were satisfied with the havoc they had wrought.

And now a strange thing happened.

Guided by the fitful gleams of lightning, a figure crept with difficulty toward the first of the victims. There was immediate danger of being blown from the narrow vantage-ground, and this figure moved slowly and as though exhausted, for he too had been pressed close by this same storm, and his strength was far spent; but he believed it was in trying to save himself this trouble had come upon them. It was John Beech—not dead yet, and, even under these disadvantageous circumstances, devising in his rude fashion the downfall of that proud foe who had been all but successful in his method of settling an old account. Only let John Beech stand once again on terra firma, and give him time and opportunity, he promised himself sweet satisfaction! Altogether, from the number of hunters, our lion Noel should be netted ere the snow fall.

Kneeling as he had often knelt by some prostrate prize-fighter or victim of some drunken brawl, John Beech raised young Arden's sea-drenched head, and, parting the matted curls, stared hard at the white face, while the lightning favored the inspection; and then he felt, not for the heart, but for the gold repeater and the purse: he had no thought or intention of doing the young man the least injury, but for safety's sake removed these to his own keeping. All at once he became aware of something moving above, something coming down upon him, and for an instant the brute courage he possessed in plenty blenched and was shaken, for he imagined it to be a fragment of rock detached from the mass above. He put out his hand to save himself, and caught the object, which proved to be a basket suspended by a thick rope, which Williams and St. Aubyn had lowered for the wrecked. The basket contained a small flask of brandy, and this he drank off at once, then upon the strength of it commenced ascending by means of the rope; being of portly habit, the ascent was slow, but those above facilitated this by drawing in the rope, happily ignorant of its freightage. John Beech's cause was aided by the fact of the fire having burned itself out, while the one lantern was of course useless in such weather. He was over the brink on the right side almost before his preservers were conscious of his nearness to the summit; and, breaking away, he glided among the dark shrubs, the astonished Williams pausing from pursuit at a call from his master. Both were startled by this event, and St. Aubyn could not suppose it to have connection with the yacht. Who then was this? However, it was not the time to indulge in speculation, and he gave orders for the lowering of the rope once more. While John Beech was scaling the palisade and making good his escape, the master and the faithful servitor were repeating their humane attempt, but without success; there was no response, no pulling at the rope, no sign of life from below; then Williams said,

"I'm afraid they are insensible, Sir, if they are not dead; but by your leave I will fasten this end to a tree-trunk and go down and see."

"By all means."

The result of this was the arduous feat of mounting with the yachtsman, performed with safety, not mentioning a variety of knocks and bruises; and St. Aubyn had the young man conveyed to one of the sleeping apartments of the house, and, after getting him hastily into a bed, left the sufferer in the worthy hands of Martha Saxe, while returning to his work of mercy.

Martha had not been sitting by the bedside very long when there came a gentle knock upon the door, and outside stood Lena, of course urged on by Mrs. Brandon, standing back within the shadow. She had been unable to contain herself any longer, and, running to the companion's room, begged she would accompany her upon a quest of curiosity.

"Wait, my dear little girl, wait!" The pale lady quietly added, in her usual composed manner,

"He will be brought here presently, when you will naturally feel anxious, and go to see how the unfortunate young man progresses!" Hence this ultimate visit to the chamber appropriated to his use; but here an unexpected obstacle opposed the inquiry in the person of Martha Saxe, who, rising from her chair with a determined expression, stood in the doorway, and would permit neither to pass.

"Excuse me, Miss Lena, and you also, ma'am, but *I* am in charge here, and can allow no one to enter at present."

"But, my good woman—" remonstrated Mrs. Brandon, "are you aware whom you are speaking to? A pretty mark of respect to our young lady, I must confess!"

"In my respect I yield to no one, ma'am; perhaps I have Miss Lena's interest as much at heart as yourself. Anyway, this is no sight for her to look upon, and look upon it she shall not."

The attitude taken was so resolute, Mrs. Brandon at once withdrew; she depended upon finesse —the opportunity was not far distant.

"Come, my dear, it is always policy to avoid open rupture with the inferior order of beings."

Martha Saxe heard, as it was intended she should, and, re-opening the door, she asked,

"Pray do you call yourself a superior order of being, ma'am?"

"Yes, Mrs. Saxe, I do!" replied Hortense, with her most withering smile.

"Then, ma'am, I am utterly without ambition;" and, so saying, Honesty bustled back to her nursing. Toward dawn the patient became sensible to surrounding things, and to a kind hand smoothing his pillow.

"Where am I?" he asked, feebly; "and Brown —is the old man safe? I can only remember taking to the waves."

"You are in the house above the cliff, Sir; my master and our man saved you from being blown or washed from the rock. You are to receive every attention, but not to leave this room, as my master is very particular, and never allows the privacy of this house to be disturbed. Since he has saved your life, I suppose you will scarcely do less than regard his wishes?"

"Certainly, my good soul, else I should make but poor return for his kindness. As soon as I am well enough I will take my departure, and with as much quietness as possible."

"Thank you, Sir; I knew you were a gentleman;" and Martha Saxe crossed her hands over the white apron with complacent satisfaction. After that he fell into a gentle sleep, which greatly restored him. When he opened his eyes it was broad daylight. A tasteful chamber, flowers, sunshine, distant sound of music, and a girl's voice of an exquisite sweetness, formed a vivid contrast to the events of the night, and the new vigor gained by such refreshing rest so inspired him that he arose and dressed, finding his clothes all dried and folded by the bedside. His nurse, taking advantage of the calm sleep, had gone down stairs to her breakfast. The promise he had made to Martha went to pieces with other bubbles of those sleep-disturbing dreams; and the remembrance of his nurse went with them, it was all as a shadow of the night. He listened to the sound of the voice—it could be none other than the fair girl of the garden, and he would ascertain for himself if her beauty confirmed the promise of his glass. Thus do accidents thwart the best of purposes.

He entered a chamber like a very bower, and there, framed in by blush-roses, shadowed by garlands, tinted by tender hues, with an incense of sweet perfume rising around her, sat the princess at a white and gold harp, upon which she evoked the soft strains of enchantment. Unaware of his entrance, she was gazing through the trellis of flowers at the cloudless sky beyond, singing a dainty carol, one of St. Aubyn's lessons of love. A simple morning gown of blue and white striped cambric, with one of her favorite roses below the throat, was the charming dress she wore; but its pretty childishness was in itself more becoming than all her robes of royalty, and to the tired and satiated eyes of this man of many cities it seemed the very realization of his most poetic imagination. Mrs. Brandon had gone to her chamber for her accustomed half-hour's retirement after breakfast. It really seemed as though every thing favored this intrepid cavalier.

He was careful not to interrupt that sweet minstrelsy, but, seating himself with quiet composure at the table, he began turning over the leaves and pictures of a Book of Beauty, and although the illustrations were quite upon an average with the portraits in such productions, they looked positively haggard when compared with that bright young face among the roses.

When Lena arose upon the impulse she saw this cool and graceful stranger; so very much at home, even her spirit rose with antagonism. It was mortifying! An interesting invalid whom she believed half drowned, and who, according to her ethics of fiction, ought at this time to have been in a raging fever, uttering her name in broken interjections of his delirium, or something equally dreadful, which she could just peep in upon to hear; was, actually—sitting at her own little table of Poetical Caskets, Garlands of Lyrics, and Books of Beauty, and that with the most perfect self-possession, as though she had played and sung for *his* pleasure; a man—and a stranger, when she was scarcely permitted to know of the existence of such beings. She felt in a rage, and yet too embarrassed to give expression to her annoyance, so she just said nothing, standing there as though she, and not he, were the culprit, her cheeks rivaling the roses, her eyes, even in drooping, so full of language no words were needed, leaning to her harp as for protection, looking anxiously at the door which she could not reach without passing him.

"If I hadn't wanted Mrs. Brandon," she thought, "she would have been meddling about here whether I liked it or no! I wish she would come in now."

But the stranger rose with a pleasing smile, with so disarming an assurance, she was incapable of preserving further resentment, and, lifting her head, permitted her eyes to dwell with a very interested and absorbed candor upon William Arden's face.

"Forgive my coming here—blame the alluring charm of your music. I came also to thank Mr. St. Aubyn for his kindness of last night. I owe my life to the efforts of himself and those who assisted him, and, being of a very grateful nature, I could not wait until some one came to me; I have brought my thanks to you. Say that you forgive me—say—bless my heart, I forgot to tell you my name—I am William Arden, son of Mr. Arden, the clergyman, your father's friend."

"What!" cried Lena, with unaffected pleasure, "are you Willie?" She had so often heard the old pastor praise his boy as being every thing that was good and chivalrous, courtly and cultured, she welcomed the acquaintance with cordial greeting; and surely when St. Aubyn knew who this was, even he would not feel angry. Had he not over and over again asked how Willie was? How Willie was getting on? Did Willie continue in Oxford, or Germany, or London, or Paris, as the case might be? It had been Willie this and Willie that, until the name and the boy had been a sort of friend, and hence the girl, with the spontaneous, impetuous, child-like warmth natural to her, held out her hand with,

"And you are Willie?"

"Yes," he answered, with a frank smile, "I am Willie," giving the hand a cordial shake, "and so glad to know you!"

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CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM THE THRONE OF LIONS.

Lady Helen Darrell had remained at the Bedford until Grunden had completely fitted up the mansion according to her ladyship's own exclusive taste: in a style surely never before seen upon the earth. A curve, a line, an angle, not in exact symmetry, not the most gorgeous of hues, not the very quintessence of barbarian taste, and the feature was objected to and must be removed, even though involving days of labor. Cleopatra was not more fastidiously sumptuous or outrageously inelegant. That fossil chieftain the old Lord Darrell, who stood in wholesome awe of his haughty and overbearing daughter, and who could have contented himself with the humble lodge at the gates of one of his estates, viewed the surfeit of magnificence preparing for their habitation with a sort of stupor. To remonstrate with Lady Helen was, if not certain execution, the next thing to it, for it was the process of being slowly frozen to death. The glance of Lady Helen's eyes, if directed in indignation or scorn, was more scathing than the lightning; but the blighting and withering effect of Lady Helen's voice, when Lady Helen chose, defies similitude. All her life long, pride had been no name for the quality she pre-eminently possessed; but, after a certain disaster never mentioned by herself or father—a private catastrophe the well-bred forget as quickly as possible—Lady Helen's whole innate hauteur became consolidated to an intensity of bitterness without any parallel and without any precedent.

When Lady Helen condescended to allow herself to be loved by a mortal, condescended to permit that mortal to wed her, it was in a cold and queenly style and after the fashion of a marble Juno. There was abundance of exquisite languor, an excess of polished graciousness, but never a shade of warmth beyond the rare splendor of her robing.

Men in Society, who dared to admire at a distance, called her the "Queen of Night." The decorations of sullen gold, the heavy flush of crimson, the dense velvet trappings—color of huge purple grapes and amber, sensuous as the head-gear of an odalisque—lent effect to, but did not in any degree heighten, the arrogant beauty of this woman, whose attractiveness was of that order which keeps men at bay, and leaves women out of the world altogether. Her advent in Brighton naturally created an extraordinary sensation: rumor marshaled her approach; Society was apprized that the combination of empress and goddess for which it had been waiting from the days of Helen of Troy downward was upon the eve of appearing in the stately person of Helen, Lady Darrell. Unfortunately she did not accompany Lord Darrell when he made his *entrée*, it being a fancy of her ladyship's to disappoint every one if possible, and when not inconvenient to herself. Lord Darrell appeared alone, in a sumptuous chariot, upon the King's Road; and he was closely criticised, the curt estimate being that his lordship was decidedly foxy. The fact was—a natural fact, and one for which his lordship was in no way accountable—the prevailing color of his external presentment was red. This nobleman had, indeed, a singularly dry and withered appearance, reminding one, not inaptly, of an autumn leaf. In or out of Society her ladyship ignored his lordship; he was quietly retained as one of the establishment, that was all. A wit, who by her icy hauteur had been aggrieved, once alluded to her ladyship as "that sphinx of the old red sandstone;" one of her army of maids heard of this, and, owing a grudge for dismissal, persuaded the being she kept company with to write it anonymously, and, his caligraphy being the reverse of ungentlemanly, her ladyship actually read the abominable epigram; and, never having experienced any astonishing regard for this or any other member of the Darrell family, she from that moment took inveterate dislike to her geological progenitor. It did not materially affect his lordship, who, partly from inability and partly upon principle, made a point of never feeling, never seeing, and never knowing any thing. He lived, indeed, a life of utter stagnation; he had been quietly dropped out of the world by his own and by other people, and he infinitely preferred to remain there. Possibly he learned more without than he had ever had an opportunity of learning within; be that as it may, however, it is an indisputable fact that he had been quenched, totally extinguished, for a period long anterior to the date commencing this narrative.

When, therefore, the select saw Lord Darrell, their apprehensions with regard to the approaching sovereign were comfortably removed. One can generally judge of a child by the data presented in its parent. But, with her state entry and progress of subjugation, Lady Darrell was not destined to enjoy all the sweets of victory; for that self-same day her ladyship returned to her splendid drawing-room the most wretched of women. A man had passed her side, the one man she permitted herself the condescension of hating, and him she did hate as only Lady Darrell could. That man, Noel Barnard, was the cause of all her misery! She had seen him mounted upon a superb steed, as usual, riding with the old grace she knew so well, looking as imposing, as conquering, as proud, and as unyielding as herself. She had met him once in India, she believed he was in India still, hoped with a devout hope Juggernaut or some other powerful engine had done for him; and here, upon the very day of her state entrance, she encountered the old enemy more imperious and autocratic than ever. "And this man," mused Lady Darrell, "what was he? What—was—he—when I—quitted—my—senses—and—positively loved him? Ay, and not with a passion like that my sex calls love! He was to me all that a hero is, and more than a lover is ever expected to be, even by the most exacting. Was he a prince of the blood royal, or a tributary potentate of enormous wealth and most ancient lineage, descended of a dynasty dating with the stars; or some scion of the *noblesse* as honored as, though not equal to, my ancestors? I think not, and, if my memory serves me right, the person taught me drawing!" And, with ineffable disgust, the lady crouched for very shame among the velvet cushions of her carriage. She might have added—but, as we say, these ugly circumstances are resolutely forgotten—that this same man had also taught her to forsake the being whose name and home she had condescended to share: a name as honored and noble as her own, and a grand old home approved even by her fine taste, abandoned in the hour of that sore weakness; and, more than these, and more than heart and soul had ever recovered, the lasting secret of her imbittered life—her child. The illusion was quickly at an end, and, as a matter of course, Lady Helen returned to her parental home, resumed the old sway, then travelled; lived years in India, where English scandal fails to reach (so tradition treasures), and there saw him once more; returned to England, and in the famous southern town she encountered him again. And how did this affect her now? It was the problem vexing the proud lady throughout the remainder of the drive. Of course she was sufficiently human to feel mortified; although why she should experience prolonged annoyance at the occurrence was more than she could divine. There was nothing between them now; they were even as utter strangers. Had she returned to her husband, there might have been cause for dread; she had not—she was much too proud for that—and what was there now to fear?

"No, not *fear*," repeated Lady Helen to herself, "but to be displeased with!"

A morning or two afterward the lady was seated in her drawing-room, a chamber draped with mulberry-colored and rich amber velvet curtains: no looping or festooning, with disclosure of costly panels, or plates of pellucid mirrors, but the broad outspreading sweep of massive hangings, thick and weighty as looms could furnish. The autumn was coming, and Lady Darrell had no thought or intention of permitting vagrant draughts to enter. The thick, velvet-like carpet was of no fantastic pattern: broad bands of amber on a black ground—her ladyship disdained the trickery of design. Give her severity of a mighty line, color of the glorious Orient. If people expected to see her drawing-room so elegantly furnished, she would disappoint them; would introduce the downright heathenish to this town of Sybarites! At intervals huge skins of jungle beasts were spread upon the floor. By the black marble and gold mantel, where for warmth a sofa might have been placed, was a singular construction formed from designs furnished by herself (Lady Darrell was a skilled proficient with the pencil); a long, low seat, the supports of which were the feet of lions, the arms and rests made of the half forms—far as the mane's extent—of lions, with all the grand breadth of head preserved; and the covering was also of the skins of these animals, luxuriously padded and stuffed, and overthrown with velvet, soft and odorous as toilet sachets, deep purple velvet embroidered with gold. No couch could have been appointed more luxuriously.

Upon one point only, perhaps, did Lady Helen agree with the mortal she had condescended to wed, and that was the love of this Eastern order of house-furnishing. It is probable their tastes were identical in this respect, and it is a circumstance to make note of.

The wood-work in the apartment was scarce, and choice either for quaintness of carving or pleasantness of odor. No tables, sideboards, or those convenient rests for trifles our civilization deems correct; but solid pedestals of marble, the yellow marbles of Syria, Siena, and Aragon, sculpt in resemblance of classic work, and the blue bardiglio of Carrara, having black basements chased with gold. Columns bearing Florentine statuettes, and handsome slabs from Numidia, upon which, Parian mythology. It was all a stern, defiant protest, and a challenge to opinion.

It was as though the softness and ease of her life had departed, and the roseate hues which seem to cover the life's dream of other women had faded from the horizon of her destiny.

Her private maid appeared, and—would my lady receive a gentleman wishing to see her?

Lady Darrell glanced at the card and inclined her head; she became thoughtful and sombre, not stirring, even when Mr. Barnard, at whom she scarcely looked, entered the room. She might, for all visible sign, have been chiseled from one of those Syrian blocks. She asked, coldly,

"What do you require with me, Sir?"

"Permission to sit down. After that, your quiet attention."

She bowed very slightly, a cold, hard, haughty assent; it had little effect upon Noel Barnard, for whom the treatment came late in the day. He sat down; no one could be more quiet than her ladyship; and he opened his business abruptly.

"I told you once I never failed to pay old debts." She looked up at the sinister hissing tones. "Do you remember the miniature we quarreled over, the girl I told you I had loved? I, to whom all human emotions are strange; I, who was spurned from her presence, and ignobly expelled her house!" He waited, livid at the memory, and she calmly said,

"Do you think I can forget?"

"No. We are not of the forgetting class. I have only to tell you I have kept my word. Lionel Travers fled to a suicide's grave to escape dishonor; Ella Travers and her child are paupers, wandering the land!"

At mention of the word child, the proud woman seemed galvanized to sudden life and energy. Starting to her feet, standing erect with head thrown back, and hands tightly clasped together, she cried,

"Where are *my* children, Noel Barnard? Alas! I am more ill-fated than Medea, wretch that I have been!"

"I would gladly tell you if it were in my power to do so; I can tell you of *our* child, but will not; I would tell you of *your* child, but can not."

"This mystery is brutal; do you think I have no mother's feeling?"

"Even wolves have occasional fits of tenderness; your ladyship will be true to the species. After abandoning one child, and conveniently disregarding the other through all the tender and helpless period of existence, you will probably feel enabled to live your day and play your hollow part in the drama of Society, unaffected by the history of those girls; one of whom, my daughter, is well provided for, and I will take good care continues to be."

"If she is with you, let me see her, if only for five minutes. I will not disclose the truth."

"She is not with me; even if she were, I would not grant your prayer. A woman like yourself forfeits the right to recognize her offspring."

Lady Darrell sank down upon the couch with a low moan, lying there between the fierce, unpitying lions, and gasping forth her sole excuse:

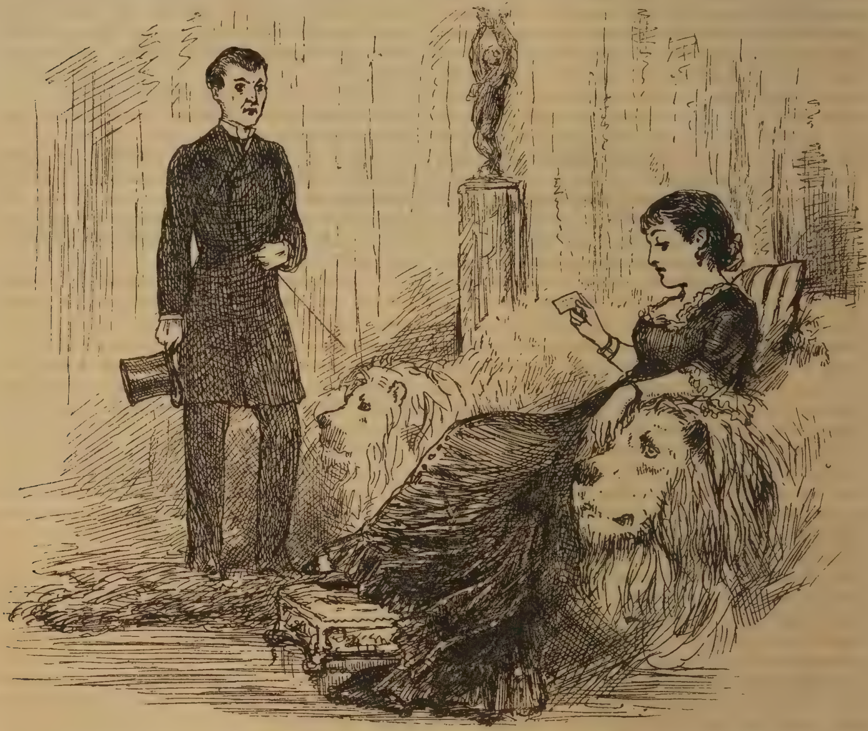
"You know I placed *his* child with an honest woman, and paid her liberally, intending for my love's sake to see my child often. I could not tell I should be dealt treacherously with. But have you no suspicion of her whereabouts?"

"I may or may not have, but certainly shall not acquaint you whether or no. It was an idiot's trick bringing her with you."

"You forget I loved my child; a creature like you can know nothing of parental love."

Mr. Barnard shrugged his shoulders.

"Did I not, just now, impress you with my solicitude for our girl? But, seriously, you would never have brought the child away had it not been for the representations of Mrs. Vincent—your friend."



"LADY DARRELL GLANCED AT THE CARD."

"My false friend!"

"You may well say that. Do you know why this fascinating woman became our go-between, conveyed letters to you, not to mention messages of her own, and painted me the angel I decidedly was not? I will tell you, and impart a lesson upon the choice of female friends."

"I never had a friend in my life!" cried Lady Helen, angrily.

"More's the pity; I've had several, even I. Mrs. Vincent loved your husband, Lord Lindon."

"She? The viper!"

"Reserve your enthusiasm until you meet her, and don't interrupt me again, for I am off to town by the express. Mrs. Vincent loved the Manor, Sleperton."

Lady Helen clinched her hand fast, holding by the mane of one of her lions, as to check the outburst upon her tongue. Relentless, coolly methodical, the narrator proceeded:

"Mrs. Vincent loved her son Lorry—"

"Whatever has this to do with it?" cried the lady, unable any longer to restrain her indignation at the matter disclosed, and the aggravating manner of the disclosure.

"This. Mrs. Vincent selected the Manor for a nice quiet home for Lorry; selected Lord Lindon for a nice quiet husband for herself. She relied upon a divorce."

"And you helped her?"

"Not at all; I liked his lordship too well. He is the only man I ever thought highly of; but—I liked you better, and I availed myself of Mrs. Vincent's assistance in transmitting letters to you. For any incidental and attendant lies it pleased that ingenious woman to throw in gratuitously, I could not be responsible, could I? But be tolerant with her, for she is a thorough artist—too much so, indeed, for me, or I should long ago have enrolled her in our corps."

"I do not wish to hear any conversation of this kind, Sir; but reducing your vulgarism to practical significance, it is clear, I think, that this person, in whom I placed a certain amount of trust, is no better than a low conspirator."

"Very low, compared with the stately carriage of your ladyship."

She laughed a dry, rattling laugh, looking down upon the broad bands of amber, and seeming to measure back the years by these. "Yes; you had plenty of such phrases then. Strange they should have seemed so sweet to me! What fools some women are!"

"You are becoming positively cynical. Take care, or you will spoil the inherent sweetness of your nature."

Without heeding the sarcasm, she suddenly asked,

"Do you know if Lord Lindon is in England?"

"Lord Lindon—is—dead."

The reply came so suddenly, without any forewarning, she was stricken speechless; so suddenly, she never questioned its truth; so emphatically, it fell like a death-blow. All unknown to any, scarcely admitted even to herself, she had treasured and lived on in the hope of a reconciliation. In her gentler moods, when, at rare intervals, the womanly and the tender took possession of her, and her whole being was suffused with a more human influence, she had dared to dwell on this, until tears would start—the only time she could ever weep—and something of a prayer, a crystal in the rock, would rise and frame to words, and the proud woman would plead for the restoration of her lost home and husband, and her child. And this had seldom been; her nature was too unyielding, and it seemed so utterly impossible. But to hear it all crushed in this cruel way, with a brevity so bitter, stayed the pulsation, and left her thrilled with a sudden horror. It was more than even her arctic self-possession could endure; and throwing her arms upon the tawny skins beside her, long, taper hands hanging listlessly down, wide bands of gold upon the white arms, she burst into a passionate flood of tears, bowing her proud face low, even to the lion chilling her by its cold dead majesty.

Mr. Barnard raised his eyeglass, and inspected the appointments of the chamber with a curious expression; walked its length, and lifted the heavy fold of curtain, letting it fall with a muffled echoing dismally suggestive. With his finger-nails upon the marble he beat a refrain that set the mourning woman quivering again, then came up to her and lightly touched her upon the shoulder, she shrinking back loathingly.

"Are we to be friends or not?" he asked; and she looked up, her eyes red with weeping.

"I would not be friends with you," she said, rocking herself to and fro with excess of pain, and never thinking of the words thus spoken, "were there no other being upon the face of the earth—as, indeed, there is not for me now!"

"Oho! that's it, is it? Well, the contrariety of spirit is a study of itself; and as I devote my whole life to study, I am thankful for the opportunity I have had of enlarging my experience. But I came to propose something to you. The old place, Sleperton Manor-house, is going to rack and ruin; you are still Lady Lindon in the eyes of the world, which knows little or nothing of the affair. Why not return to it? Live as secluded as you like, but by all means live there. You have just returned from a long residence in India; no better opportunity could serve. You have the legitimate right to take possession; do so, and one day you will admit yourself indebted for the suggestion. At the present time Mrs. Vincent has the run of the place; *you* surely have the most right to dwell beneath that roof."

The words sank deep. She knew him too well to be deceived by the apparent fairness of his suggestion. Just so much as suited her she was content to agree with, leaving the rest to the strata of vulgarity she never recognized.

"Yes," she said, reviving wonderfully, "there is truth in what you say. I will return to Sleperton; I will resume possession."

It was not often that Mr. Barnard permitted an expression of pleasure to light up his sardonic countenance, but the grim face now wore a positively cheerful aspect; not a whit more ingratiating, however, to the Lady Helen.

"It will be a pity, leaving this saffron bower; but most of your properties appear movable, and you will have a more extended area for the display of this unique taste."

The door opened, and Lord Darrell walked quietly in, glided to a shadowy corner, where, behind a yellow pillar, he lapsed into the tawny hue of the skin upon which he had seated himself. Unspoken to and unspeaking, a ray of shrouded light stealing across the floor, he appeared, disappeared, and was no more. Now what an interesting destiny must this be! One meets with odd characters in life, and eras of singular experience, but commend us to the old red sandstone period for something truly exciting!

"I shall remain in Brighton until the close of the season," remarked Lady Helen, noticing neither her father nor the visitor, and apparently addressing herself as though framing the course of future movements; "I shall only stay in town a fortnight in December, and re-open Sleperton Manor-house with the New Year."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WALTER GORDON'S" PILGRIMAGE.

The grave charge brought by Mr. Barnard against his "articled pupil" was perfectly correct: that intelligent youth had made good his retreat. But the slight exaggeration of his having decamped with valuable papers was not correct. "Walter Gordon" quitted the office of her whilom protector without so much as a scrap of paper or any thing else. Contriving to cross the road unobserved, she snatched a hurried interview with Gabrielle, who, pressing upon "Walter" her entire stock of ready money, and explaining the road leading to Hertfordshire, secured her safe escape from the house and street. Standing alone in the crowded streets of London, she realized again the terrible lot of the unprotected. To be unprotected is sufficient disaster, but when to this is added the ever-present fear of being tracked by some enemy, the desolateness becomes complete.

A waif upon the world! Anxious to obtain some means of livelihood by honest work, and discovering how very difficult it is even to secure this graceless concession on the part of fortune!

The words of Sir Charles Neville would ring in her ears, "Be sure and apply to me when you require a friend." She half wished she had really done so, but then came back the warning of that boy with the lovely face, of whom she was ever thinking, whose image had displaced the flitting picture of that exquisite who had first won her girlish fancy. Then more vivid than all was the vision of the fair and saint-like face of Gabrielle, looking so spiritual, so good, so tender, so like those ideal conceptions of sweet martyr-women, the cherished dreams of Art. She took this with her upon the journey to an unknown life, clinging to the memory of that face as to an influence for good, placing it sacred in her breast and upon her heart, as the maidens of French pastorals place memory of the Virgin, and feeling the stronger for this, there being a sustaining power about the religion of a guiding, guardian angel.

She had no fixed plan beyond the march to Farmer Percival's in Hertfordshire; once there, she would feel safe, and might, if all went well, remain until new strength was gained; and then, with money earned and saved, she would pursue her search for that loving parent, whom once recovered, she felt all her troubles would cease.

It was a bold scheme, but the abandoned and the destitute have frequently implanted within them a desperate and courageous resolution foreign to the natures of those better provided for.

This was the motive of that long and toilsome pilgrimage. Even while money sufficient to defray the cost of the journey was in her possession, she must expend for bare necessaries even more than she could willingly spare, but the residue should be placed aside for the purpose so dear to her. "But what if," argued the shadowy genius ever at the elbow of the unfortunate to whisper a dread upon the most beloved of projects—"what if he is not in the land? what if his home is occupied by others, who, after all this lapse of years, love and are loved as you would have been?" "Well, then," she thought, "I would crawl back to the old house at Sleperton, and would fall down before my mother's portrait, and die."

The broad thoroughfare she walked along—the Marylebone Road—crowded by well-dressed and happy-looking people, bent upon their business or their pleasure, served to distract her attention, yet the contrast with her forlorn state was too significant to admit of long abstraction. In order that she might not miss her way or be compelled to ask at frequent intervals, Gabrielle had directed her by broad unmistakable lines of road; and along the first of these she was pursuing her course, when, close by Gloucester Place, a crowd collected at the corner suddenly divided, a man dashed from the hold of a policeman and tore off, quickly followed by the rabble. Her first experience of a London crowd was a rough one, but she instinctively saved the little stock of coin from loss. Continuing her way, a great church filled her mind with other thoughts. People were going in for evening prayer; the place looked so quiet and restful, so like a haven in the midst of tumultuous distraction, she was tempted to enter; and its lights and dim composing twilight had a soothing influence. Sitting very near to the door, and feeling sadly like a hypocrite in that boy's disguise, the lonely waif listened to and caught up the shreds of prayer and praise, of singing and of music, as eagerly and devotedly as though some bright spirit rapt in the ecstasy of worship. "Walter's" life had not been a church-going life by any means; the yearning for higher things had been unable to expand itself; the undefined aspiration for some happier state, independent of her temporal condition, had been lost with those dreams which came and went, painting her weary life with the sole colors it received, and vanishing to leave it darker by the loss. Not for long might the child tarry; wide London was to be traversed before she could even commence the journey through the country. Fortunately Hertfordshire was at no great distance, nor was Farmer Percival's at any distant part of Hertfordshire. How she longed for the quiet life, resolved to work with a zest that should surprise herself—although what at, she could not tell. How she would love the kind ones who were to befriend her in these dark unsheltered days—how try, by all her strength, to repay their sympathy and help!

Lights were appearing in the streets when she left the church. The shops in the Euston Road gleamed with a more homely look. The outcasts welcome the gas-time; they walk with more freedom, and beneath grateful cover of that light can look their fellow-creatures in the face. Upon one side, as by contrast, and as though all life through there is a gray chill side to every thing, the statuary yards, crowded with colorless stone, sent a nameless depression to the bravely struggling heart.

By the time she reached Euston Square it was almost dark. Trees wore a shrouded, comfortless look, and shrubs clustered together as though brooding in council. It was nothing; but she somehow thought of dull country ways at this hour, when the land would indeed look desolate. These hurrying citizens and merry chattering little ones, these lines of lights and rushing of vehicles, all took away that sense of loneliness natural to one by one's self at shadow-time. But these trees were dismal enough; and the child walked on more quickly to where the throng of people was greater, and the vehicles more numerous.

Slowly the walk up Pentonville was proceeded with; and because she was tired and faint, and could scarcely drag one step behind another, she, looking beyond to the summit of the higher ground, set the face that was to her saint-like and clear, at that point, and bore up bravely to it. More weak at every step, and thinking this a poor beginning, she tried to comfort and cheer herself by talking soothingly and with infinite compassion, as she had heard *her* talk; and so making her way onward, inch by inch, to that angle of big London where so many cross each other's destinies—the "Angel" corner at Islington. Here, with her wild half-gypsy fancy, she had made a niche for her guardian. Struggling on with a sublime light in the great eyes, born of no flickering city lamp, she grew more faint from fatigue, and looking for, as it were almost expecting, the tender hand would clasp her own. So, on to the corner where the throng was greatest, looking wistfully in many faces, having placed *her* there. Then sight became dim and more dim, and she staggered back beside the glittering hostel, sinking to the pavement at the very moment the one she had stationed there came breathless to her side—raising the pretty face, colorless and wan, and murmuring, "Thank God, in time!"

An influence for which none need account beyond the solicitude of her own kind heart had prompted Gabrielle to try and overtake her *protégée.* She could not, walking—and from delicate health, as she knew, walking slowly—have proceeded any great distance; and, thinking of a point of interception, this seemed the most likely to prove successful. Begging, then, the company of Cousin George, who left his books reluctantly for what he feared would prove a wild-goose chase, she had taken a cab to this very place, and waited there a good half hour. Sore trial of patience this to the author, but he improved the shining hour in gathering honey for his cells by taking mental notes of service for his work. And, as she felt would be the case, the sought-for had *not* passed, and *was* in piteous need of a sister hand.

You know how soon the crowd collects, be it horse, or girl, or boy, or what not. And here good George came in with magnificent effect, and Gabrielle said she had never seen him do a better deed in better time. Scattering the starers, and lifting the child, he placed her in the cab, and then drove off, before the representative policeman had awakened to the knowledge that something was amiss. In Gabrielle's arms, head fallen back, face lifted to the lights they quickly passed, unconscious still, but eminently happy, the child looked so beautiful that her friend could not help stooping to a loving kiss; then blushing, looked up, and caught George Percival's thoughtful eyes bent upon her.

"*Flowers and China*," said Gabrielle, smiling, and gently placing her charge in a more comfortable position. Noticing that he wore a strangely absent manner, and an almost sad expression of countenance, she said,

"You are lost in thought. I ought not to have taken you from the writing."

"Yes, I was thinking—thinking, Gabrielle, I would much rather some other home could be found for this poor boy than with my father."

Gabrielle looked up surprised.

"What! Still unreconciled to that? I thought you had given an implied consent?"

"Since you had written and made all preparation before I knew of your design—done, I admit, with the best of motives—I saw no use in prolonging the matter, and upsetting all your plans; but my annoyance was most sincere."

"I should like to know the motive of this strong objection. It can not be that uncle and aunt will be put out in that large house, or that they will fail in kindest treatment, for no kinder ones exist. What is it, then?"

He pressed her hand with gratitude at the compliment to his beloved parents, but lapsed into silence when she taxed him with that question.

"Well, I *have* reasons, weighty reasons, Gabrielle; and some day I will tell you them, but for the present no matter; let things rest, and if he goes, he goes."

Gabrielle pondered upon it much: usually so clear and open, he seemed keeping something from her—she was careful to think *seemed*, because on no account would she have injured him even in thought. Her love was too sacred a sentiment for that: the love which exalts its object above all reproach, or the love would not exist.

"Does he seem strong enough to learn farming?" asked George. "More girl than boy, he looks as though the hard life on the land would shatter him to pieces."

"Well, the fact is, George, we know nothing about farming. Your father has promised to find him occupation; he does not mention what."

"How much better it would have been to have found him employment in London! If you had asked me, I would have made room for him as messenger at the bank."

"Do you not remember, George, I told you of his apprehensions lest some of those circus people should find him and compel his return to the business? He lives in mortal terror of this, for he suffered so much at it."

"Your protection of the child is romantic. What might I not have made of your just now kissing this handsome youth, were I so disposed, or adopted the school of writing which claims this sort of thing for its chief academy? Poor little fellow, I am sorry for the long walk before him, although I can not recommend railway travelling alone while he is so weak."

Proceeding by way of the Upper Street as far as Highbury, the cab there turned suddenly upon the right hand. They were relieving her of the long preliminary to her journey. And when "Walter" came to herself it was to find Gabrielle sewing at her bedside, and Mr. Percival reading in a low tone from the evening paper, the scene being located in the comfortable guest-chamber of the last hotel of any importance upon the road to St. Alban's.

"There, there," said Gabrielle, gently, "he is coming round nicely, and by to-morrow morning will be in better order for walking. We will instruct the landlady to have some fresh-laid eggs, new milk, and sweet home-made bread in readiness for his breakfast, so that he will not have to wait."

She knew the child was listening to every word, but said it thus not to trouble "Walter" to talk. Lying there so patient and delicate-looking, with additional fairness from the surrounding of white dimity, Gabrielle felt almost unable to leave the child, but she must either do so, or inform George of the truth. As it was, she could see that her cousin from some reason or other appeared slightly agitated—she could tell, as love tells, by small signs; notably by the nervous grasp of the paper, and that tremulous cadence at all times an indication of emotion; and, like sensitive and tender-hearted women generally, she took this reproachfully to herself.

Silently "Walter" pressed her hand, given with so much innocent sympathy; pressed it to lips and bosom, seeming to cling thereto as for very life; looking up in her face with eyes overrunning with tears. It was an idyl of touching affection, none the less deep for being so quiet; and all this while Cousin George, not to lose time, was assiduously reading the review of a recent novel, wherein hearts were tossed hither and thither in a manner the critic styled "unnaturally exaggerated," and which George, with his calmly viewing insight, pronounced overdrawn also. These men and critics, how they ignore the battledoor and shuttlecock of life, planted upon their impassible pedestals; until some day their own turn comes for play, and they prove just as overdrawn themselves.

He was still reading the review when Gabrielle, having taken a locket and fine chain from her neck, removed from it a miniature of George, leaving the other picture—an exquisitely correct likeness of herself; she clasped this about the child's neck, then stooping to a sweet farewell kiss, rose to go. "Walter" turned her face away, and never moved while the two went quietly from the apartment, George believing the child was sleeping. Down stairs, Gabrielle made the proposed arrangements for the morrow, and paid the woman, who was an honest, homely soul, with motherly feelings; and Gabrielle with quick instinct knew that the child would be well cared for.

It was a clear starlight night, there was a considerable distance to walk before any conveyance by road or rail could be secured, but Gabrielle was not sorry, for starlight walks with George were very few and far between, and for the most part confined to the holidays. Each autumn they had spent the three weeks the manager was allotted for his annual rest, in Hertfordshire, and these were the only quiet delicious bits of green in her life; but this year, owing to the temporary indisposition of her mother, poor Gabrielle had been unable to accompany her companion of so many seasons. She never told a soul how bitter the disappointment was, but applied herself with redoubled energy to the nursing of the sick, not caring afterward to go down alone, but looking forward to the year to come. Self-denial was so fine a constituent of her nature, and duty so beautiful a shading to the whole principle of her life, that even greater sacrifice than this would have been performed without a murmur. Few knew—and, as usual, those of the household least of all—the subtle goodness elevating this character. The poor, the unfortunate, the sorrowing, who never came to her house, and whom she discovered through the channel of no church, these blessed the woman with the angel face, as they described her, sometimes knowing no name by which to call her, nor any means on earth whereby to trace her. Silently she went into the wretched homes, as silently departed, yet ever doing a good work in the short time there; making up the quarrels poverty is so apt to engender, leading man and woman to think more kindly of each other, quieting noisy children, and making the sick-room pleasant as a bed of roses; placing food in foodless cupboards, and shoes on shoeless feet, sitting down to needle-work while talking, and with her own hand making tea; yet no impossible creation, no heroine of a bloodless ideal, but a sensible, practical girl, too old to command interest doubtless, but a thoroughly worthy character for all that; as are many we pass over for the younger, more showy, and more fashionably dressed; and withal one who, if born to love, was born to suffer.

George was walking silently along looking up at the stars. They met few people, and these, companions like themselves; engaged all day probably at the marts of commerce, and taking these quiet walks as most in accord with their ideas of contrast with the busy turmoil of the day, possibly as reminding them of earlier times before the youth and poetry had been ground out of them by stern necessity.

"What are you thinking of? This book seems to absorb more consideration than any preceding work."

"I wish it to be my masterpiece. I think it will."

"You are, naturally, stronger by every success. Few have done more in so short a time. The story concluded with the midsummer part of the magazine was decidedly your best work yet."

"Do you think so? Re-reading it in print, it seems very poor."

"But why?"

"I can not tell; I only know it fails to satisfy me; perhaps because uninspired."

"And the work you are engaged upon—"

"Is certainly more so. Or" (correcting himself) "realizes more closely my ideal of the beautiful."

"If you are as precise in your judgment of George Percival's work as of other men's, it must realize a very high standard indeed to be truly artistic."

"There is a deeper aspiration than that, which is, to arrive at the truly natural."

"And you are doing this?"

"Yes, I am doing this; and how happily rare it is for the truly natural to be attended by unnatural pain!"

"Whatever do you mean?—That a work so perfectly realizing your conceptions gives you pain to write?"

"I fear it may cause pain in reading."

"You were ever sensitive about your books. I should not like to be a writer, they seem to suffer so."

"And have equal capacity for enjoyment, arising from their finer sensibility, this being held in control by stern common-sense. Once let a writer give way to weakness, and he is the worst of all poor fools, and suffers most."

"I never heard it put more plainly."

"We are so used to glossing over error, and its consequence, pain!"

"You admit, then, the writer is as human as the rest of us?"

"I admit the writer to be ten times as human as any of you: by very necessity, and by inexorable laws of nature. Else," asked he thoughtfully of himself, "how should we be the weaklings we often are?" He was evidently thinking of something foreign to their conversation. Gabrielle walked on musingly; then asked, to turn the current of his thoughts:

"It would be worth knowing your exclusive opinion upon the true art of writing."

"That is soon defined. It should possess strong originality, vivacity, refinement of diction, and sensitive perception of character: the writer should be careful, never hasty, always natural, and should digest his subject ten years before imparting his views. He should avoid florid language and extravagance: say much in a few words as explicitly yet eloquently as possible, and bearing in mind the mixed company that goes to make up a public audience. He should avoid both mannerism and imitation, a bad style of one's own being better than a good style copied—imitation, after all, reduced to its level, being little above plagiarism. His descriptive passages should be easy, without straining after undue effect, and without losing the opportunity of improving a situation by detail. His characters should be distinct and well studied, and the ten years' system will also work advantageously in this. Not a character in my new book but has been in my mind's eye preparing for translation for at least that term. Each character should be a type; pleasing or repulsive, always a type; not crowded upon the canvas if there is no room or need for it, but should be drawn with the utmost care, painted in with power, and shaded off with delicacy. The roughest of characters have their delicate shading, did we but look at them in the right light."

"And many a delicate character has its rough shading, I think."

"You are still with the unfortunate boy at the inn."

"I confess he came to mind with your words. But go on."

"I have almost given my views. I especially dislike veneering of morality and religion, and I believe the sensible reader holds all such tricks in proper contempt: in another sense, it is the custom with some writers to make free use of the Almighty's name, profanity which shocks and displeases all thoughtful persons. Politics should be abstained from, political sentiments being apt to give offense: personality also should never be indulged in, it being one of the most vulgar, even though the most classical, of all the tempers of authorship. Some writers display as much mock-modesty as others do profligacy, and both are alike detestable! I am calling none of these to account, dear Gabrielle—merely giving you a few of my ideas upon the art and accomplishment of writing. No grander symmetry of conception, taking ethical perfection to be based upon language, can exist than falls to the kingdom of the creator of fiction. The tender instincts which cause these records to gleam amidst dead ranks of literature, and to stand imperial in the whole history of letters, are that men's hearts beat responsively, and that therein the mirror is held up to nature—"

"Not always."

"Thanks for the correction; no, not always, as my friend the reviewer pointed out in that capital article I read to you: you thought that a good notice, Gabrielle? Rather hard hitting, but directed for the writer's good, and, taken altogether, an excellent *critique!*"

"I am ashamed to say I did not follow it as closely as I should have done." And she was ashamed to say his own opinions were much more interesting to her.

"The truth is, music and effect aid and support the religion of authorship, much as they aid and support other religions; the faith would die unless fed by the luxury of spectacle, of sound—half melodious, half lyrical, and perfume the sensuous message of the Unseen to the soul. In this I note the significant absence of comfort and solace, the bulwarks of the lasting, and a mysticism of unsatisfied and sensitive melancholy that appears to be supreme. I hold that the great end of writing is not thus reached. A page designed for broad-cast diffusion should do more than air the penchant or the taste of one. A book may be a magnificent myth—a pleasing, delusive fable strung with even more than Oriental elegance; but it practically fails as a work of true art, should no end be gained, and no purpose be held in view, from the first word to the last."

"And does my philosopher's new work fulfill this precise condition?—I, more mortal, ignorantly imagining the end of all fiction was gained by the amusement it afforded."

"Yes," said George Percival, with a shade of sadness underlying the tone of his reply, "it fulfills this condition."

"I am eager to read your new study—a study, I suppose, from the life?"

"From the life, Gabrielle."

"One or more of those imposing Directors of the London and Olympian?"

"No, Gabrielle, they are safe for this time at least."

"More interesting personages, doubtless?"

"More interesting to you and me, for they are —ourselves!"

They were interrupted by the approach of several caravans belonging to some travelling show, proceeding at a slow pace, and causing Gabrielle to ask him the meaning.

"Is there a fair?"

"Not that I know of; it looks more like the advance carriages of some circus."

She agreed with him. There was an unmistakable look about such vehicles even from the distance. As they came nearer, the surmise was found correct; evidently they contained the paraphernalia which could best be spared from the camping of some equestrian establishment. At the front of each carriage a lantern was hanging, swinging above the head of a sleepy driver, its glimmer shining fitfully upon the dreary-looking gilt embellishments of these vans. Upon the sides the effect was more weird. Visible only by the starlight, they presented, where not wrappered over, a strange array of flying steeds, dimly defined dragons, and other monsters native to the renowned legends of equestrian drama. Upon front and sides various characters of large and attractive form announced the design and connection of this train of carriages; the notice thus acquainting the public that it was—

RINGDOM AND TANNER'S
GREAT UNITED CIRQUE AND HIPPODROME,
AND
COLOSSAL AMPHITHEATRE OF VARIETIES.

One by one the heavy, toiling wagons passed them upon their way; at the windows of the "living vans" a glimpse was obtained of the inmates, women and children; and the sight of a girl leaning her arms upon the ledge, looking forth watching the country, gave Gabrielle a thrill, for she thought of "Walter." Was the child safe? These people would pass the very house —might, nay, very likely would, enter for refreshment—and, for all she knew, this was the company from which she had escaped; and that night, or early upon the morrow, the remaining members of the troupe and additional caravans would be upon the same road, so that nothing would be gained even if she returned; besides, she could not so far trespass upon the good nature of her companion, who, although a cousin, was also a bank manager and an author, a combination which she contemplated with considerable awe.

They stood upon a bridge over the river Lea, watching the lights beyond the meadows—stood hand in hand, as she had thought long ere this to stand with him, and that forever; side by side, no other soul being by, and there was no sound save the little ripple of the water where it interlaced the reeds. It was such an opportunity for him to tell her that he loved her, all was so favorable, and it would have moved her with joy to hear the words so long waited for. He was looking down in the water, surely he was thinking what to say; his hand was trembling—yes, he was about to speak at last.

"Look, Gabrielle, there's a rat after that tadpole!"

She said, quietly, not pettishly, "Poor little thing!" And she meant it; she was no more of the order of girl who shows impatience at a disappointment than was he of the order of man who snatches at every or any opportunity to tell any or every girl how much he loves her. A very prosaic couple indeed.

They went on again after that, beautifully calm and refreshed: the dew was falling, so it could not be otherwise.

But that night Gabrielle was awake long after he, tired with writing and full of thought, trod softly past her door.

"I shall be glad when he completes this new story; my darling has not been the same since he commenced it after returning from his holiday."

She could call him her darling there if nowhere else; might call him thus until somebody else's darling. But at that—pleased with a passing thought of his soon being the public's darling, soon being famed and wealthy—she fell to sleep, and dreaming, revisited that river-side, fancied herself upon the bridge, and was looking over, when, with a startled cry, she awoke. Then, when awake, the picture grew more real than the instant's glance which caused the cry had been; and she fancied she had beheld the figure of her cousin, stooping over the lovely form of a little girl he seemed to have in some way rescued, and the child was gazing up in his face with the most winning look she had ever seen.

"Oh dear!" quoth Gabrielle, "this comes of my escapade. I could scarcely expect to do so much, and go so far, and dream none of it; but what a mixed affair my dream has made of it! Poor little one, I hope you are quietly sleeping now, and I hope you will find dear Aunt and Uncle Percival both well."

And how fidgety and sad a dream makes some people!

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER NIGHT COMES DAWN.

Half asleep and half awake, "Walter" was suddenly aroused by a sound which set her quaking. There was no doubt of the meaning of that rumbling noise, becoming every minute more distinct. She had passed too sad and lengthy an apprenticeship to the night marches of these caravans not to recognize the warning echo; and the child trembled with horror, for what might not their coming portend?

In the extremity of her fear, she scarcely dared breathe, and with each heart-beat the line of wagons seemed a step nearer. She knew the habits of the fraternity too well to suppose they would go past without stopping, with no other hostelry, perhaps, for miles. No artillery was ever more dreaded by doomed villagers. It seemed prolonged to indefinite torture, because the progress was so slow. Her brow was damp with fear, every remaining atom of strength fled from her limbs, and she felt helpless as some infant.

Still nearer came the advancing train; it was almost at the house; the foremost carriage slackened speed; there was a general stoppage. She could contain herself in such horrible suspense no longer, but glided from her bed to the window, and there, by the light of the lamp below the sign, read, with blanched face, the names of her old masters.

For the instant a deadly sickness overcame her, then the necessity or supposed necessity for immediate action. To lie there when each minute was one of peril, to lie there when, if these passed by, more searching danger would menace her with approach of the principals, was out of the question, a sheer impossibility!

She had been placed upon the bed without the removal of so much as her jacket, and now, snatching up her cap, she stole down the old-fashioned stairs, and was out in the back court-yard before the half-sleepy driver of the team had descended from the first of the circus wagons. Not many such customers came that way, but all the men and all the maids must be in front; hence our boy-girl got clear off unseen by any other than a line of moles nailed to the barn door-post.

It seemed dreadfully cold turning out thus from the cozy shelter of that pleasant chamber, and she shivered and trembled first with fear, and next from the cold, until it became doubtful if a more miserable little mortal was abroad that night.

The wide gloomy country on either side looked so cheerless, so peopled by shadows, she scarcely dared to glance to right or left. Her teeth chattered as she recalled her feelings by Euston Square, by those trees that wore the shrouded and comfortless look, and those shrubs clustered together as though brooding in council.

The farther she proceeded upon the road the more dismal it became, with great black woods, and hideous lines of darkness. She could not go back, because to return would be as horrible as to press on; more so, knowing its waste of gloom; whereas she might come upon some farm or cottage by keeping on. It was an alternative chilling and uncertain, and her heart sank when she remembered how early the folks went to bed in these quiet places; but she kept on, and held both hands clasped firm upon her bosom, where Gabrielle's locket was warm as a thought of the absent one.

Every now and then she stood still and listened, trying to detect if the wagons were continuing upon their way. Nothing could be heard but the buzzing of hedge-side insects, croaking of frogs in ebony pools, or distant baying of some hound. She passed a farm with outlying buildings, and a range of stacks rising pale and weird of form by the road-side. Close down by one of these, with their backs to the hay for warmth, huddled two poor souls more wretched than herself, asleep after a long day's tramping. She sped on, nor glanced to see if some open barn offered shelter until the morning. All the lights were out at the house, and the darkness before and beyond was but a change of deadness.

She came to a hill. Upon the summit was a stone, and, taking it for a mile-stone, she knelt down to decipher, if possible, the distance to the next town; but she read thereon, with a shudder: "*Here Miller Coates, of Enfield, was murdered on the night of September the 3rd*, 1803."

Down the slope of that hill she ran, never daring to cast a look either way, and breathing a silent prayer for safety. Beyond this was a village street, with some few houses removed and stationed among trees gaunt and dusky; no lights, no shelter. To the rear a small, square-towered church, draped with ivy, looked in mourning for the dead that lay around; a great wooden door closed even the porch of this, and "Walter" walked on with a still heavier heart.

Her strength was spent, and now it was a matter of great difficulty dragging her feet along from field to field. To fall there at the roadside would be to risk discovery by those she feared, coming that way sooner or later. She would crawl down one of the dreary misty meadows, and hide in some dry ditch. With this intention she opened a gate, the gate to a narrow lane, high-banked, and so overgrown with foliage it was dark as night; every glimpse of the starry sky was lost, and it was with cautious outfeeling slowness she made the progress she did.

It seemed to get darker at every step, when all in a moment she was dazzled by a bright illumined scene, which, revealed so suddenly, seemed like enchantment. It was the *bijou* sitting-room of a charming cottage to which the lane was an approach: an apartment with open glass door and a perfect bower of flowers; a candelabrum of wax lights at the side caused all the brightness which at first so overcame the night-bound. Even from the outside it could be seen that this cottage was furnished in a rich and tasteful manner, and with a French lightness doubly captivating when contrasted with the long dark way preceding this glimpse of fairy-land. The occupant of the room heard the footstep, light as it was, and, rising from a couch, laid down the book he had been reading, and stepped out upon the gravel-path of his garden. He was a rather handsome man, of pale complexion, and coal black hair, partly curling, and pushed carelessly back from the temples. He wore a negligent tunic of black velvet, and was smoking a cigar of great fragrance. He gazed with surprise at the slender child before him, and with a gentle movement pushed her more into the light.

"Who are you?" he asked, at once deciding it was no village urchin after the peaches.

"My name is 'Walter Gordon;' I have lost my way. I will thank you so much for permission to rest till morning in your kitchen."

The gentleman—an artist of eminence accustomed to strange models, and with a quick eye for the beautiful, stood looking at this wild and bewildered yet lovely vagrant, hesitating what to do; then he led her in, and said,

"Well, my young friend, I see no particular reason why you should not stay, although I do not keep open house in the general way; quite the reverse; but sit down and give me your references."

With which pleasant words and pleasant manner, accompanied with a smile of re-assurance, he resumed his position, and proceeded with the enjoyment of the cigar.

"I did not expect a visitor to-night, I give you my word, young Sir; but I am none the less pleased at being able to provide you with shelter, for, excuse me, you look any thing but adapted to journeying at this hour. My servants go to bed early, but I will, by your leave, open an account between yourself and my larder."

"I thank you, Sir; I shall feel glad of a little refreshment to take off the faintness and fatigue from which I am suffering."

"Come along, then, and when you have recovered yourself you will tell me how you came in this plight. Running away from home, I suppose? Ran away from home myself when about your age; but I can see now what a young rascal I was; not to say you are a young rascal, until I know more of the circumstances. But carry that *liqueur* of brandy and the candle, please, and we will see if some more becoming tinting may not be restored to those cheeks."

Saying this, he good-humoredly led the way to the housekeeper's room, opening from which was the pantry, containing a variety of tempting viands, and from these he permitted his visitor to make her choice.

He admired this wanderer, who had appeared as though born of the book he was reading; and he conceived the project of inducing him to remain a while, and conveying the expressive face and picturesque little form to his canvas. He was an artist of rare and delicate skill, whose paintings obtained hanging of honor at the Academy, and whose work was in great request in gallery and drawing-room.

Having fared modestly, and "retinted," at request of her new friend, to the extent of tasting the brandy and water her host had provided, "Walter" returned with him to the small apartment by which she had entered.

"You are cold," said the artist, thoughtfully, closing the window and fastening the shutter; and then the child did indeed feel more at home.

"And now tell me all about it;" and he arranged himself gracefully upon the couch, having first motioned his visitor into a luxurious arm-chair; "I am all attention."

"You have been so kind to me, Sir, I wish there was something to tell that would enlist your sympathy for me; but there is very little, and in that I am seen by a bad light, unfortunately."

"Leave the lights to me, my child; I am accustomed to bad lights. Is it home or school?"

"Home I have none, nor have I ever had. My schooling days have long been over. It is from a cruel apprenticeship I am escaping, and am on the way to kind strangers I have never seen, who are about to find me employment of some sort."

"I am sorry for you, because I believe you have no right to be in this position."

"No, indeed! My father was a gentleman; but where he is, or if living even, is more than I can tell. I only know I am unutterably wretched!"

"Oh! come, come! I dare say I can alter this; or, at all events, I will try. You shall stay and assist me in my studio for a time, and learn something of painting—see yourself, if you like, in one or other of my pictures. I want some such face as yours for a goat-boy of the Tyrol, and a gondolier's son of Maggiore. You can pose to a picturesque attitude, I can see, and I shall be the indebted; so make yourself happy and contented. Stay as long as agreeable to you, and go when tired of the seclusion of an artist's woodland home. And now for bed; you are tired, my cigar is out, and we are early risers."

He held forth his hand with winning, welcoming hospitality, and "Walter" took it, her eyes filled with tears, her sensitive heart more full of gratitude than words can tell. It was so complete a change in that short time she could scarcely realize it; she wondered if there was something she knew not of that attracted others to her in spite of her misfortunes? She might have been told it was the sad beauty of the large, speaking eyes, the aristocratic contour of form and feature, the tremulous refinement of voice, and the nameless charm never by any chance absent from her manner; and it was all this that had made her so valuable to the circus, and so great a loss.

Later, in the tiny room opening from the larger chamber of the host, "Walter," lying awake, heard the rumbling of heavy wagons on the road above the lane—heard, and without fear—and rested with a delicious sense of safety, slept with a blissful peace unknown before, and dreamed, with hues of exquisite phantasy, a poem of the artist, of Gabrielle, of Lorry Vincent; and never awoke till morning.

She had scarcely dressed herself when her host, who was no other than Lord Ellerby, and who made this country house a studio for the exercise of his artistic fancies, came in to greet her.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

HÔNI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.

When St. Aubyn came calmly to consider the consequences of his charitable action, he blamed himself for undue haste and excess of philanthropy. Yet what human being could or would have denied shelter, under such terrible circumstances, to any one? Had it not been for the assistance thus rendered, this venturesome yachtsman must have perished in the storm.

"I have only acted as any man with a grain of commiseration and pity would have done; and if, by mischance, Lena and he should meet, I must trust to her kind and grateful heart to keep me in mind, and to at once retire."

He knew nothing then of the morning's meeting, when Willie had surprised her at the harp, and she had said to him,

"I did not know, while watching you from the cliff, and wishing I could let myself down to you, that it was the Willie I've been so longing to see."

"No; or else you would really have done so?" and he took her hand, gazing in her eyes, and saying, as eloquently as could be, "How beautiful you are, and how much I admire you!"

"Well, I think I should. I am rather fond of birds'-nesting, and I wouldn't have made any trouble about it."

Mr. Arden laughed. It was a boyish, honest, enjoyable laugh; and Lena, who had heard little enough of this sort of music, looked innocently into his face, and said,

"Oh! I wish you would laugh once more, it's delightful! And how good-looking you are, to be sure! Do you know, you remind me of the noble Greeks in one of papa's books—Homer. I suppose you know Homer?"

"I'm sorry to say I do," replied William Arden, with a wry face, "a little too intimately."

"Well, now sit down. I want you to talk to me, and tell me something I wish to know; I can not ask that tedious Mrs. Brandon, because she launches out into such a lecture upon love and nonsense of that sort, and I've resolved never to have any thing to do with it."

Mr. Arden's hair began to stand on end. He had never heard a young lady talk like this one; it was *naïveté* with a vengeance. Yet she was so bewitchingly pretty, he was over head and ears in love with her already.

She made him sit down beside her, watching anxiously for the smiles she so loved to see, and which were like letters of some new and delightful language.

"Tell me," she said, "is the world so very large, beyond the boarding of our garden?"

"Rather!" he replied, with a merry twinkle.

"You've been round it in your yacht?"

"Not all round it."

"I want to know why, in all the poems I have read, the men make such commotion about the maids. Why is it? Now can you tell me? I can not get papa or Mrs. Brandon to explain to me half I want to know."

"May I ask if you are alluding to the Homer?"

"Don't say '*may* I ask,' but ask outright; and you may call me 'dear' if you like; it's short and pretty, and I shall be pleased with it from your lips. Mrs. Brandon says 'dear' as though she meant griffin, or some other cold-blooded animal. You have yet to make that lady's acquaintance, and you'll not forget it. But now tell me the allegory of men and maids."

"Goodness knows! I don't. You'd better ask my father; he has lived longer in this wicked world!" And with mock gravity Mr. Arden seriously looked the fair girl in the face, for as yet he could hardly believe his senses, and feared she might turn out bold and forward after all.

"If this is all genuine," he said to himself, "she is the most exquisite little girl I have ever been acquainted with, and I shall think it a burning shame if she does not see the world beyond the boarding of their garden, and under my able and chivalrous tutorship. We are old friends by this, and need be under very little ceremony—as for ceremony, she won't let one!"

"But tell me," she persisted, "why do all the men, in all the poems and all the pictures, seem to think of nothing but pursuing and capturing those like myself?"

He was completely posed by this out-Heroding of simplicity, but explained the best way he could:

"You see, dear, when the flood was setting things to rights, the animals all consorted two and two for company, and the sociableness and sympathy thus provoked has continued as a lasting memento of what ought to be. If you were to go into that strange and crowded world of which you have spoken, you would there see the same linked companionship."

"How very strange! And these links—are they ever broken?"

"Very often, I'm sorry to say!" answered Mentor, with a half grave, half comical expression of countenance.

"Ah, that's a pity! And can one link with another at will?"

"Well, not exactly; a little understanding is necessary, not to mention propriety."

"Because I was going to say, I should like to link with you!"

Mr. Arden could really stand no more; he could tolerate as much as most young yachtsmen, but this was going a step too far; and adjusting his collar with dignity, while assuming the aspect of true British decorum, he said, "My dear young lady, knowing you have never been to boarding-school, I make allowance for your ignorance; but do let me beg of you to reform your style of conversation; because if you ever should get abroad, and indulge in this sort of talk with every body you meet, I don't know what will become of you."

She was easily wounded, and began to cry, chiefly because she feared she had offended him.

"I can't help it; I know nothing; I never see any body; I want some one to talk to of my own age, some one, as you say is proper, with whom to link myself—"

"Yes, but I am not of your own age; I am ever so much older than you."

She stood beside him, placed a hand in his, and said, firmly, "I do so want to see this great world and its people. Will you take me? I am never likely to if you will not. Promise me, when you are well enough, and go away from here, that I shall accompany you. Promise me!"

It was the one thing of all others he would have liked; but this very candor so effectually disarmed him, he could but think of the man whose happiness was bound up in this child.

"But your father, my dear Miss St. Aubyn; think! I am sure he would not consent, and to do this opposed to his wishes would be to act treacherously. Do you know you remind me awfully of Eve, with your innocence, and guilelessness, and desire for knowledge? Now let me tell you, when Eve had that desire gratified, there was no more innocence and no more happiness."

"But you will forgive my saying, Mr. Willie, that I know just as much as you do about those Scripture stories; and neither you nor I have any right to say there was no more innocence and no more happiness. I could know all I want to know and preserve both, and link myself into the bargain."

"You are incorrigible!"

"I think I am, and the best thing you can do is to try and make me better."

"I shouldn't have taken all the trouble I have to come and see you, had I suspected you to be the troublesome young lady you are," he said, rising.

She laughed merrily, placing her hands upon his mouth, and they were good friends enough. It was quite a brotherly and sisterly friendship, and, with William Arden's sense of prudence and of right, seemed perfectly safe, even though he had lingered so long in those waters for the purpose of her expressed wish, and even though he now felt that he could love her with the gold and not the dross of love.

He shook the proffered hand, and giving it a little squeeze, said,

"Good-by for the present; I must return to my room, or I shall have nurse back, rating me soundly for disobeying her orders."

Soon afterward Mrs. Brandon came in, finding the girl sitting melancholy beside her harp.

"What is the matter—another string broken?"

"Oh yes, another string broken."

"Tell its Brandon all about it, there's a dearie!"

"You're not my Brandon, and, if I had my will, would be somebody else's instead of papa's."

The quiet lady very demurely removed a speck of dust from her white cuff, and permitted it to border the hand reposing between the folds of her black silk dress, looking the embodiment of respectable, if aggrieved, gentility.

"My young lady is outrageously uncomplimentary; but there's one thing, it's said *before* my face."

"And isn't half so bad as the things I should say behind your back, only I've nobody to say them to except dear old Martha Saxe. I always spend all my time with her in picking you to pieces."

Mrs. Brandon shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of mild contempt.

"I should like to know what has put you out to-day."

"Well, then, know and tremble: I have seen *him*, and he isn't half so nice as I expected. You said he would kiss me, but he didn't."

"Of course not at first; they never do; it's hand-shaking, to begin with, and one thing leads to another."

"It's too slow for me: all at once, and then something else, is my motto. And I asked him to take me to see the world, and he refused to do that."

"Of course he would—getting himself into a mess through a child like you. Why, it's punishable by law. You must not lay him open to any such contingency, but watch his departure, and go after him. That, you see, saves him from the compromising nature of the proceeding."

"What's that?"

"I can not explain now: I really think sometimes, child, you plead ignorance for the purpose."

"Of course I do, to be enlightened; you might have seen an instance of that just now."

"I heard it; I was in the breakfast parlor, with the door open. You rather overstepped the bounds of youthful modesty; young men think so much of that. I trembled for you as though you had been my own."

"You are an old hypocrite! Where's papa?"

"In the study, you playful child. Oh, what pleasure there must be in the enjoyment of such excellent spirits! Mark my sedateness; that is affliction, dear; the rough usage of the world."

"Well, if the world takes upon every one the effect it has upon you, I think I had better keep out of it." And with this parting shot Lena ran off to St. Aubyn, leaving the duenna looking particularly sour.

He was paler than usual, and the hand trembled while twining the soft curls about her head. The reverent, loving touch told all the wondrous passion which had been the blessing, yet might prove the bane, of that bruised life.

"Please, papa, I've come to tell you I've seen Willie Arden. I thought it right to tell you;" said, not in the spirit of confession, but of confidence, and so spontaneously he knew nothing had occurred to which even he could take exception; and yet how it paralyzed him! One can not board up a treasure from the world so many years to discuss tamely the natural history of a possible poacher.

"And does my darling feel much the happier, having done so?"

"Not much; he's rather stupid. But I should think a young man exactly like him, who knew a thing or two, would be very nice."

"My dear Lena, I entirely disapprove of this style of criticism; it is rude, and partakes of levity."

"Well, I don't know any thing about that; I talk pretty much as I feel. Ah, there's Kit; I've to pay her out for teasing Dick!" Abruptly descending from his knee, she swooped upon the unfortunate culprit, a magnificent cat of foreign breed, one of the costly toys St. Aubyn had provided to promote her pleasure and enjoyment. It is doubtful if she had ever had one wish ungratified, save that dangerous but perfectly natural one of the discovery of the world. The world that was probably so large, filled with so many more things than she had ever seen, and where beings moved who were altogether different to those she had hitherto met—heroic and handsome men, and women like a throng of queens. She had an old book of geography secreted away somewhere, containing a description of the mighty metropolis; and a quaint court history, from which she deduced the conclusion that London was principally inhabited by lords and ladies, dukes and duchesses, earls and countesses, compared with whom plain Mr.'s were as nothing. She had longed for some one who would talk with her upon these matters—tell her of the exalted beings of whom she had but her own fancy to guide her in conceiving. Mentioning them to St. Aubyn was to give instant pain; the poet face clouded, and he would almost querulously entreat her not to talk or think of any such nonsense: whereupon she thought the more.

Finding matters had gone as far as they had, St. Aubyn, making a grace of necessity, sent to William Arden, inviting him down to join them, at the same time forwarding a note to his old friend, William's father, acquainting him with what had occurred, and delicately suggesting that he should drive over for his son. Mr. Arden was pastor of a village six miles from the coast, peopled by fisher families, stone-quarriers, laborers of the agricultural tracts, and stragglers from Whitby, poor men, but skilled in the carving of jet. The Rev. Mr. Arden entertained affectionate esteem for the master of the Boarded House, knowing he was his sole visitor, and being to some extent in the confidence of the recluse, for whom, although not agreeing with, he was full of sympathy. His parish and rural labors had yielded no experience of the finer phases of human suffering; it had been in the rough for the most part, and when, years ago, the cultured inmate of the great new house upon the cliff had sent for him, and there in his own house at regular intervals received the ministry of the Church, Mr. Arden had welcomed the unusual break in the monotony of dull country labor with excessive pleasure, and the two became quietly appreciative companions. Once or twice he had ventured to reason with the stately scholar thus isolated from the world, but Ashton St. Aubyn was not, at this day, a man to be reasoned with. In past times it might have been otherwise.

William Arden was relieved to find that Lena was just as vivacious, contrary, and absurd in the presence of Mrs. Brandon and her father as she had been when with himself, and was so much of a child still—one of the first things done upon his joining them in the sitting-room being to introduce him to her doll, a large and very beautiful specimen of wax moulding.

"Don't you like dolls?" she asked, disappointedly, seeing it was received with awkwardness; the young man really not understanding the handling of it.

"Not much."

"Ah! Perhaps you like those who play with them better?"

Now here was a confusing question, especially when illustrated by her roguish smile. He nodded slightly, and escaped to St. Aubyn, who was cutting the leaves of a newspaper with marked deliberation.

"I have been admiring the view from your house, Mr. St. Aubyn. You displayed true artistic judgment in the selection of its site."

The master bowed. "Do you think so? My chief object was to escape tourists and the other abominable offshoots and stragglers from modern society."

"Grumpy old tyrant," said William to himself; "I thought he would like me to admire his fortress." Mr. St. Aubyn handed him the paper, and William, who was very forgiving, forgave at once. He glanced through the journal, glad of the occupation, with a quiet look now and again at the fair girl trimming her ferns.

"Sleperton Manor-house!" exclaimed William, suddenly, looking up from his reading. "Why, my father has a pencil drawing of that place over the mantel-piece in his room! I don't know how he came to be possessed of it, but I am almost sure that is the name."

"Well, what is the matter, Sir? A fire?" asked St. Aubyn, rising, and, without betraying any conspicuous interest, manifesting a slight impatience.

"Oh no; this is the paragraph; I will read it: 'We have it upon creditable authority that the fine old residence known as Sleperton Manor-house, the ancestral seat of the Lindons, which has been for many years unoccupied, is being restored and refurnished in expectation of the return of Lady Lindon, who, after prolonged absence in India, will, it is stated, sojourn several months in the year at the Manor-house.'"

Mrs. Brandon rose, quietly observing, "I think Williams has come back, Sir;" then holding the door ajar, and making way respectfully. St. Aubyn, as he passed out, rewarded her with a glance of deep gratitude. Hortense Brandon never lost an opportunity of seizing the time and tune, and it was by such little things that she maintained the ascendency she possessed. She saw he was suffering acutely, and her instinct told her she would win gratitude by thus contriving his retreat.

Within a couple of hours the Rev. Mr. Arden arrived, greatly to William's surprise and somewhat to his annoyance. It seemed such happiness to be sitting down in the same room with Lena, who was so unlike any being he had ever met. She had acquired unlimited sway.

After the old gentleman had expressed exuberant gratitude for the preservation of his boy, and affectionately embraced him, Mr. Arden and St. Aubyn retired to the study, where the master acquainted his friend with the strange piece of news concerning Sleperton Manor-house.

"You would do well to take such gossip with reservation, my dear Sir; but there is nothing to prevent your running down yourself, and ascertaining if it is correct."

St. Aubyn shook his head. "I do not like to desert Lena even for that short time: and, after all, why should I trouble or care? Am I not dead to all the world? Lady Lindon is welcome to return, although the motive, I admit, is inexplicable to me."

"Do not be restless about Lena, if you would like to go. My son's term has almost expired, and he will return to his duties on Monday evening at the latest."

"Thanks, my dear friend. You, knowing all, know also how sincere is my appreciation of your thoughtfulness. I should like to see the old place once again."

"Then go, and God speed you. I would accompany you myself, but that I shall render you greater service by watching over your one ewe lamb. I will drive over every day. By-the-bye, you have confidence in this Mrs. Brandon—I mean to the extent of leaving her in charge?"

"Perfect confidence; she studies my happiness closely. She has peculiarities, like the rest of us, but is an estimable and worthy person. A clergyman's widow, by-the-way, I have always understood!"

"Then I am not surprised her husband is no longer among us!" said Mr. Arden to himself.

It was time to go. Lena, winding a ball of wool by the window, looked up to say good-by, first to Mr. Arden and next to his son, St. Aubyn standing near, feeling as though he could sever the hand touching that of his darling. He had suffered himself once, and time was when he was the most unsuspecting of men.

"Good-by, Miss Lena!" There was such clear, honest light in his Saxon eyes, even St. Aubyn felt ashamed of his annoyance.

"Good-by, Willie!" she said, returning his look so roguishly his good resolutions tottered again; and to complete her wickedness she let fall a pair of sleeve-links, which he picked up and handed back to her with a face that was scarlet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ONE EWE LAMB.

On the Monday following St. Aubyn left home. It was the first time he had been absent, and the forebodings he experienced he looked upon as natural, and in no sense in the light of a presentiment. It required some resolution to make up his mind upon this question of departure, but this hesitation seemed so weak and unmanly, he strove to forget the disinclination altogether in remembrance of the pleasure it would give him to visit again, if but for an hour, the old Manor-house at Sleperton.

Lena did not like it at all. She pouted, turned very cross, would not say good-by at first, or accept his farewell kiss, and repeatedly declared she would go as well. However, it was managed somehow, and the willful beauty appeared reconciled to her banishment. He promised to bring her all sorts of presents, and made her write out a list of all the things she wanted in the world. He would return on Tuesday evening, if not too late, the nights being dark, and the road a lonely one; or on Wednesday morning at the furthest.

After going some distance from the house, he could not resist returning to say "good-by" again, half disposed to give up his journey; it was so hard to leave her.

"Take care of her," he said, with dim eyes, holding Mrs. Brandon's hand in his, "you can not tell how hard it is for me to leave her!" All sympathy, her face wearing a tenderly compassionate look, the worthy and estimable person pledged herself to exert the most solicitous guardianship. And he went away sad and dull, but contented.

"And now, my darling, is your time!" said the sweet woman when they were alone. "Young Mr. Arden can not have started; make him take you to London, and give you a glimpse of the City of Lords and Ladies!"

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon, but is there time? Can I get back before papa returns?"

"Get back! Why, there's time to go to China! You'll never have another opportunity."

"Papa will be so grieved when I tell him; for I should tell him, and directly."

"Of course you would; you are always doing some such ridiculous action. But decide, and I'll get your things together, and take them to the foot of the cliff, where I will wait till you join me."

"I'm so bewildered now it comes to the chance, but nevertheless, I should like to go, and of course Willie can take care of me; but will *you* go, dear Mrs. Brandon? You haven't had a holiday for some time."

"Not now, my child, I—am—waiting! Sight-seeing always gives me the headache; but you are young, and have all to see."

"Yes, I will go!" cried Lena, starting up and clapping her hands, the pretty face irradiated with smiles. And then that faithful woman put together a few articles of clothing such as the child would be likely to want for her journey. Muttering at her work, she disclosed, had any one been there to listen, the nature of her diabolical plot.—"Now, missy, I shall be even with you for your studied impertinence, and with you, Mr. Noel Barnard, for your worse deceit. Return! No, she will not return; wrong blood in her veins! And a lovely child like that adrift upon the world will find no lack of friends to prevent it. You want to see the world, my dear, and the lords and the dukes and the earls? Well, you're going to, and I hope you'll see one you fancy, and leave this precious hermit to my tender care! If Master Arden's the laddie I take him for, he'll perfect the education he has been privileged to commence. So I've done my best for you. A mother couldn't have done more." Cold, snake-like, bitter as death, the tone and the voice. Was there no spirit hovering near to bring back the loving guardian of the child's tender youth? Was there no influence to re-direct homeward his reluctant steps, so that this terrible catastrophe might be averted? Alas! all seemed favorable to the false woman's scheme. She quitted the house unobserved, and at the foot of the cliff was shortly afterward joined by the young lady. Even this was new ground to Lena, and she looked about her with a sense of delight and wonderment.

Although a long walk, they went over the ground quickly, animated by very opposite feelings; to Lena the distance seemed nothing, all was so new and strange. And so this was the world? She loved it already. She had seen little of it yet, however, save the gray stone cottages, and cotter girls with handkerchiefs about their heads. When the village was reached, she was properly impressed by its size and the quaint groups of cottages; but it was at the house of Parson Arden that she felt the greatest thrill; this also was of stone, and gray, but so covered with creepers it looked like some picture.

William Arden was reclining on a garden seat, cigar in mouth, and dozing; and now came the need for caution by Mrs. Brandon, who, like all creatures of the reptile class, had an inner sense which indicates the enemy: the lady entertained a strong objection to being seen from the Parsonage windows. They adopted the device of throwing a pebble. Lena aimed it, and hit Mr. Arden upon the nose. He got up, swearing at the humble-bees, and then heard his name called from the direction of the roadway.

"Willie!" He was over the fence in a flash, and found Lena there, blushing and beautiful, and he bowed to her, with a happy smile over all his face.

"I've come, Willie."

"So I see. I was but just dreaming of you. How good of you to give us a call! But come in; father's preparing his sermon, and there is no one to interfere with us."

"I haven't time; I'm going with you to London, and *must* come back to-morrow."

He opened his eyes wide at that. Mrs. Brandon explained all, aside. "If you don't take her, she'll go alone."

"Then so she shall," said Willie, who did not believe a word of it, and who, to do him justice, would never have acted in the manner required of him; "but *I* advise Miss Lena's return to the house. Why, you can not know what you are talking about, either of you."

"I do not," replied the companion, with an extremely simple air. "I know no more of the dear child's fancy for London than I know of London itself; but I do know she is bent upon going, and that it will take a stronger will than mine to turn her."

"Then let mine be that stronger will. Oh, Lena *dear*, I would not take my own little sister, had I one—how much less you! Stay away; rest content with your beautiful home, I beg!"

"It's all very well for you, who have been all over the world and seen every thing, to give that advice; but do you know, Willie, I am growing up an ignoramus as regards geography? Whatever shall I know, and whatever good shall I be?"

"You will know quite enough and be good enough to make any honest man happy, Lena, and to be the sunshine of his home and heart." He took her hand; she did not withdraw it; and he thought he had gained his point, when, at a sign from Mrs. Brandon, she said, "Good-by." Yes, he imagined she would return to the house upon the cliff.

"Now," said Mrs. Brandon, when Willie Arden was out of sight, "as that young man will not prove your friend, I must."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ADRIFT.

Mrs. Brandon hailed the driver of a wagon plodding at slow speed along the main road; the man contemplated her with an obtuse, insolent stare.

"Are you going many miles along the London road, my good fellow?"

"Yes I be, a matter o' ninety or so."

"Then, if I give you five shillings, you'll give my niece a lift, and set her down wherever you're bound for?"

"Ay, that I will, an' with pleasure, an' take moighty care on her; so jump ye up, my lass; here's a heap o' sacks, and sure you're welcome!"

But the child demurred.

"Come, don't be silly, the man can't wait. Now's your time, my love, and a pleasant journey." And the child, who knew nothing of travelling or of distance, did so, the woman kissing her black-mittened hand, while the wagon went slowly on its way.

"Well, I fancy you're a little bit of a fool, William," said the plotter, as she cautiously passed Mr. Arden's house on her way home, "and I think Miss Lena St. Aubyn is wiped off the slate!"

Sheltered from the wind, shadowed from the sun, enthroned upon her pile of sacks, Lena's advent into the world was a tolerably curious one; and, both amused and frightened, she looked along the broad backs of the horses at the white stretch of roadway, and wondered what marvels were in store for her. The rough smock of the countryman and his wide-awake hat were objects of singular interest to her, and she wondered at his red neck and face and the silly smile puckering his cheeks, but not impressed by these, she confined her attention to the scenery upon either side.

Not so her companion, who, never having seen any thing so fresh and pretty, fed his eyes greedily. Disposed to be good-natured, he produced a hunch of bread and bacon, which he offered to share with her, but she declined it with civil thanks.

"Be's you a milkmaid from the village?" he asked.

"No, I be'nt!" replied the girl, copying the dialect, and returning his gaze unflinchingly.

"Well, what be ye?"

"That's neither here nor there; you were paid to give me a lift, weren't you, not to ask questions? Save those for my aunt when you get back."

He said no more, and the girl had a long, silent, tedious interval to herself, and she thought there was not so much to see in the world after all. They did certainly pass an ancient castle, partly in ruins and partly inhabited, and Lena gazed with speculative interest on the ivied turrets and narrow loop-holes set in dismantled battlements. They came, after this, upon a rock-scattered expanse of moorland, upon purple reaches of thick undergrowth, upon stone walls winding away, dividing the property, upon streams gushing over the bowlders and rippling among the bracken, upon mills with lofty chimneys that struck the girl with amazement, and long arrays of windows where the factories clove the landscape with a clear white line; they came upon low-pitched cottages, with great gardens, from which their summer splendor had departed, and genteel houses that seemed to frown down upon the others of less degree, and slim-spired churches in sharp relief against the sky. There was ample time for observing all, for their progress was slow; but the girl commenced to weary of it, looking back.

"I do think that Willie Arden a disagreeable thing!" she said to herself, fidgeting the ear of one of the sacks, and feeling tired of sitting so long in one position.

"If you don't mind, I should like to get down for a little while, and when we come to the next inn have something to eat and drink." He pulled up at that, and the girl sprang lightly to the ground. It was a singular sensation, that of unfettered freedom even after the years of gentle restraint. At liberty to go whither she would, no one to say her nay, the wide world before her, and no one to control or stop her wandering. Yet, for all the sense of pleasant liberty, she missed the loving voice to which she had been so long accustomed, the face with its melancholy beauty and imperious firmness. Looking at the sky where the arch was losing the brightness of its lustre, she asked her guide when they would reach the end of their journey.

"Not afore to-morrow arternoon or evening, mum; and we'll have to go well to do it by then," he replied, affectionately whisking a fly from the horse's flank.

The girl stood overwhelmed. Why, she must be back again by that! "Whatever could Mrs. Brandon have been thinking of?" and, cast upon her own resources, she thought more deeply than ever before in her life. She had plenty of money with her, and would not waste time crawling along the world like a snail: she would travel in one of those things they had seen darting along the embankment, with volleys of smoke and sparks flying from the head.

"You see that," pointing to the serpent disappearing in the distance, "isn't that a train?"

"Yes, mum."

"Take me to where they stop and wait for the people, and I'll give you half a crown."

"Well, sure an' I will! New Malton's close by here, and the station, where ye can book for York or London, or wheresomever ye choose."

At the station her plaintive "I want to go to London, please!" so thawed a stony dignitary in fustian, that he took her under his especial care, procured her a ticket, and placed her securely in a first-class compartment. Then began a new sensation; and can any thing be more startling than travelling thus for the first time? The country seemed to her to be flying past the windows, and she was speculating upon the meaning of those long wires running along beside them, and moving now up, now down, when they glided into a great maze of houses and streets, and she saw for the first time a city. "York!" was called out, and she referred in memory to the geography of that place, but could remember nothing of it, and she looked down upon the outspread panorama with awe and admiration. The bustle and confusion upon the platform, and excitement of the day altogether, gave her a slight headache; one lady and gentleman in the carriage were very kind, however, and in spite of the commotion she felt more at home than she had done in the wagon.

Another long track, but which from the diversity of the scenery on either side appeared short to the novice, and Doncaster was reached. Here she was much amused at a number of hounds, slim, graceful, tawny, or leaden colored, held in leash, and which she wished to jump out and fondle; never having seen such, they pleased her by their elegance and glossy coats. The compartment filled up here; three gentlemen in gray shooting dress, and evidently, from directions given to servants in livery, the owners of the greyhounds, entering with much ease of manner and laughter. These quickly remarked their fair neighbor; her eyes not drooping, for very innocence, beneath their bold gaze, they began to think, "What manner of maid is this?" One desired politely to know whether she would like the window closed. Another remarked upon the extreme beauty of the day. The third did not speak, but looked, and the child edged nearer her female fellow-passenger. This lady kindly inquired how far she was going, and she replied to London. Both the lady and her husband regarded her with benevolent interest. There was an understanding of some occult nature between the three gentlemen, who looked at the blushing girl and at one another, and appeared particularly relieved when, at Retford, the lady and gentleman prepared to leave the carriage. A pleasant prospect changing very much when, having removed their wraps and bags from the carriage, the lady called Lena to her, and said,

"Come out of this carriage, my dear; I think we can find you a more comfortable one." And they placed her in a compartment where the majority of the occupants were ladies. How the defenseless are watched over! Could St. Aubyn have contemplated for one moment the contingency of his beautiful child ever being boarded in with three men of the world, as appeared for the moment imminent! Yet utter strangers saw, and saved! What a long time it takes us to believe there really are people so graciously thoughtful!

Lena's new neighbors were a Sister of Mercy (who puzzled her extremely), and her friend, a lady of severe neatness, engaged in knitting a stocking, and who asked her if she was confirmed. Not understanding the meaning of the question, Lena answered in the affirmative, and the lady nodded with placid satisfaction. There was also a lady of florid belongings, who was in a state of much uneasiness concerning a pet parrot she carried in its cage upon her knee; this lady became violently excited at each stopping-place, because, upon dispatching one of the officials to ascertain, she discovered that the refreshment contractors did not supply bird-seed, and, for this reason, falling foul of the good man and every member of his family, and of every servant of the company, and the whole railway system altogether. Lena felt rather afraid of this lady, but she solicited permission to look at the parrot, so mollifying the Amazon that she uncovered the bird, which, beginning immediately to call the Sister of Mercy names, had to be sent to roost again without an introduction. And there was a very thin and wedge-like lady who sat bolt-upright, fixing the child with a steely stare, and never looking to the right hand or the left; Lena, who supposed she had a stiff neck, felt full of compassion, and not in the least affected by the metallic expression. There was a little gentleman, in a great hurry, fuming because the train was so late, and vowing he would make a complaint; it was very irritating, but the others could not help it, and took no further notice of him; the parrot pecked at him through the brown paper until the gentleman's eyes watered to wring that parrot's neck. Her fellow-passengers sufficiently amused our little girl to make the distance bridging Retford and Peterborough one-half the length it seemed to the ordinary traveller.

And all this time the sky grew paler, and a deeper blue was spreading in the east; at some of the village houses lights began to twinkle, and windows of road-side ale-houses shone red upon dusky backgrounds of fallow land. The streamlets, winding like shining ribbons athwart dull green acres, looked weird and ghastly, and like the decoration of *diablerie.* Farm-yards were shadowy, and the clustered cattle looked like ungainly masses of sombre color. Stars came forth one by one; she wondered were these the stars she had so often watched, and she thought with a sigh of the dear old house upon the cliff.

When St. Albans was reached, the lights in the shop windows and lively aspect of the town at its brightest time caused the child to wish herself at her journey's end; she had taken little refreshment during the day, being buoyed up by excitement, and now faintness and lowness were the natural consequences of the reaction. She was told London was near, and she looked forth with renewed interest. And towns were thicker together here; they seemed to glide from one to another, quick almost as thought, and houses became more numerous between the towns. Then streets in line, then great works, and netting of vast lines of lights, huge buildings, and a mass of houses, with a hazy cloud overhanging the city, and no more stars or clear blue sky; distant rumbling of the traffic, swaying in the air of the mighty buzz, a throb as of a great heart beating, a crush of confused sounds, glimpses of thronged streets, keen echoes of the business doing, crowds of hurrying men and women, and soft gliding of the compartment alongside a platform; then Babel.

"What is this?" she asked, with a frightened look. And the answer came,

"It is London!" And they hastened away, leaving her sitting in the carriage, rubbing her eyes, and not knowing what to do next. A guard came up:

"Now, miss, if you please!" looking with some suspicion at the confused young mortal. And she left the carriage, and was jostled about to the end of the platform, and from thence into the streets, where she staggered, so overwhelming was that new experience.

She did not know what to do, but looked in the shop windows, and, tired though she was, felt vastly entertained. But what a contrast to her calm, uneventful life!

She was at King's Cross, and she threaded her way among the people with brave determination to see the most in the short time before her. Keeping to the line of shops, and following the way vehicles and those upon the pavement were chiefly moving, she took the western direction, and after walking some distance along Euston Road, arrived at a confusing junction of dazzling thoroughfares, where, indeed, Tottenham Court Road and Hampstead Road intersect the main route. The glitter enticing her each way, and reminding her of her fanciful visions of Lord and Ladydom, she ventured to accost a pleasant-looking woman of many colors.

"Can you tell me, ma'am, where the lords and ladies walk, if you please?"

Whereat the woman looked down upon this country questioner with a comical expression, but told her, genially enough,

"You must make for the west, my dear; ask for Regent Street; any one will direct you; but first take yonder road and go to its end, when you can ask again."

The matron looked, long after the pretty child had walked away in the direction pointed out, and she said, "Pity she is out alone this time of the evening! I hope her poor mother knows on it; indeed I wish I hadn't told her the way now."

And Lena trudged onward, as unconscious of ill in the great city as of its extent; onward by way of Tottenham Court Road into Oxford Street; and then asked for Regent Street, and was guided by the undeviating courtesy of the Londoner. Shops were closed for the most part in the grand crescent, but many overdressed people were walking the promenade. Were these the lords and ladies? she wondered. How beautiful the city looked!—and she wandered on until she came to a square where, right opposite, was a large building, illuminated and highly brilliant; and asking of an old Irishwoman its meaning, was told it was the "Palace."

"Then there," cried Lena, "must be where the lords and ladies walk!"

And assured with a fiendish grin that such was the case, this dove, fallen so mishappily upon grimy city ways, made for the glittering temple of amusement, and was pausing before the entrance, wondering how best to obtain admittance, and watching with vivid interest the lords and ladies arriving in their chariots. Then noticing a man of most kind and thoughtful aspect, and who bore more than any she had seen, in her opinion, an air of lordliness, although to be sure its nobility was somewhat faded, she timidly stopped him, while hurrying on his way intent in thought, and talking importantly to himself.

"Will you tell me, Sir, where I may see the lords and ladies?"

And he drew himself up with a jerk, looking down on the piece of blushing eagerness before him, perhaps caught by the wistfulness in her eloquent eyes, or moved by that confidence in himself.

"To be sure I will: at my lodgings. They are coming to-night, and you will be welcome! And better there than out here at this time of the night." And the man they thought mad took the little stranger reverently by the hand, leading her to a quiet street where few lights served to bedazzle, and but a few of London's citizens found their way; and on the course thereto he said to her, impressively,

"I am Sir Dickson Cheffinger; you will not forget my name—Sir Dickson Cheffinger. Always call me so, before our noble and illustrious guests, and alone. And you?"

"*I* am a princess!"

"I have waited for this!" cried Sir Dickson, breathlessly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LENA.

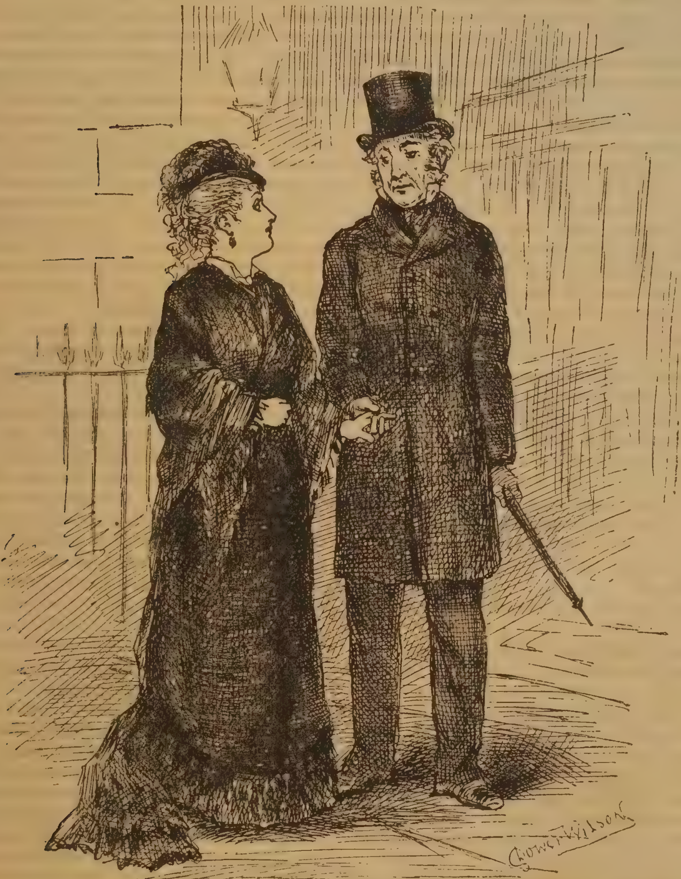
The effect of Lena's announcement upon Mr. Cheffinger was so startling and all-absorbing that he scarcely deemed it proper to violate etiquette by any longer walking by her side. With the most supreme homage he stood aside while she preceded him into the humble lodging, and with the graceful deference of a courtier of the old school he waited at the foot of the stairs until she had passed.

"May it please your highness to enter the chamber immediately upon your right?"

It was dark, and she tumbled over a hassock; but royalty does not keep on the ground long, and this vivacious representative was not very much discomposed. Mr. Cheffinger was in agony; to think that a princess—the princess, doubtless, he had been so long expecting—should meet with such a disaster in his reception-room, filled him with sincere regret, and for the time deprived him of the power of searching for the lucifer-matches. While this necessary quest was pursued, and the poor fellow, in sore confusion, fumbled about for those useful articles, it was with accompaniment of nervous explanation:

"I very much beg your highness's pardon, and am sorry to keep you waiting. My man is away for a holiday during my stay in town, and I am so apt, in the hurry of seeing visitors off, to mislay the tapers; I never can recollect where I saw them last—came upon them the other day in the coffee-pot. 'Now, how,' said I to the duke, who was waiting much as you may be waiting now—'how, by the heralds', came they there?' 'Some of those fellows again,' said his royal highness, 'up to their pranks.' And so I suppose it was; but where they are now is more than I can fathom."

Lena began to feel a little alarmed. It was all very well to have her rank admitted—she had so styled herself in a playful mood, remembering, with half a pang, the master's term of endearment—but looking for lords and ladies in the dark was not much good. The worst of it was, as Mr. Cheffinger groped, he knocked over every thing that came in his way. Commencing with the mantel-piece, he made a clean sweep round the room; some articles were broken, more were too solid to break, but the clatter was ominous, and the visitor was thinking about retiring, when the absent-minded gentleman discovered the box under the pillow of the pallet in one corner of the room. Upon a light being obtained, a scene of extraordinary confusion was revealed, the whole place being upside down and in a state of terrific disorder. The maid of the house, standing in fear of this particular lodger, preserved her own safety by leaving him to himself, and never intruding, much to the said lodger's satisfaction. Being engaged in the pursuit of the mission for one or other of his employers, neither



"AND THE MAN THEY THOUGHT MAD TOOK THE LITTLE STRANGER REVERENTLY BY THE HAND."

of whom had seen or communicated with him since entering upon his work, he was absent the whole day. He was beginning to feel a little disheartened. He had traced his friend the Minister's interest right away from Devon into Hertfordshire, but there he had lost all clew. He had stood near to a great estate known as Beresford Park, and in front of the stone portals of the entrance gates, invoking the lordly denizen of that domain until the lodge-keeper had let the dog at him, and poor Cheffinger had beaten a precipitate retreat. It was very mortifying, after the tedious tracing for so great a distance, effected under all sorts of disastrous misadventure; and the indefatigable explorer resolved upon returning to those noble friends in Brighton, who visited him when quietly at home in his humble state, but so few of whom cared to notice him now that he was always on the move. To make matters more critical, his store of specie was nearly exhausted; and he returned to London, and there remained, using the utmost economy, and devoting every day to the interests of those who, in return for his success, would restore to him his rights and privileges. First to one end of London and then to another he had been, in search of any body who corresponded with the description furnished with so much accuracy. A clearer head might have been pardoned for becoming muddled over such an interminable errand; but the state of muddle Dickson Cheffinger's brain got into defies description.

"You see, it's the crossings," he explained to the princess, after narrating the manifold experience of the past few days. "I get half over, and don't know which way to take, and so many are shouting at once, I can not attend to all; and in the midst of it Lord Somebody will hail me from one of the corners, and when I get there be gone! I was nearly run over the other evening," he said, with solemnity, "and had I not raised a hand and cried, 'Back! It is Sir Dickson Cheffinger!' I should have been. It was an honored name once in London—shall be again!"

Lena listened with patience and sympathy; she was glad to have come in the way of the good, innocent, kind, if feeble-minded one, and gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips with a gallantry delightful to witness.

"And do you never expect to discover the poor boy who ran away, Sir Dickson?"

"Oh yes. I shall come upon the little chap one of these days in my walks."

"And then you will get back your papers?"

"I pray so, fervently."

"And what will you do with the poor boy? Hand him over to his master?"

"No," replied the man they thought mad; "I shall send him on his way, tell him to be a good boy, and never do it again."

"Then you are a dear, kind Sir Cheffinger, and *I* should like to help you to find him."

"Do you know," said the poor gentleman, solemnly, "I am not so very much surprised he ran away from the solicitor, for he is an awful-looking person, and even I felt timid in his presence. And *you* offer to assist my search? Nay, then, I *must* succeed. Sometimes in the night, when I lie awake thinking of the Cheffinger estates, I have seemed to hear a sweet voice encouraging me; and now that I hear yours, and become familiar with it, I believe you, princess, must have been that good and tender genius."

"It is kind of you to say this, although rather like a fairy tale; and somehow *you* do not seem like the people hurrying to and fro in the world who passed me this evening. I should think you could be very kind if you had some one to love and to love you. I wish Willie Arden was here to talk with us."

"Many are coming. As I walked along the streets men whispered, 'We are going to stand by Sir Dickson Cheffinger's house to see the company arrive. There is a grand reception to-night, and royalty is expected.' And when passing some of the great club-houses at Bethnal Green, I heard one lord say to another, 'Can't stop, old fellow; off to Cheffinger's; some awfully nice people there to-night.' And another said, 'The moke is in the barry; slope it!'—club terms these gentlemen of fashion use one to another. And they are coming—all coming—and we shall be busy as bees. I get so excited when James is not here to announce them, and they crowd in so I can scarcely greet them fast enough; but they are very good, and make no noise, and will be extra decorous to-night, your highness being here. Hush! they are coming. Listen to the trail of those court robes, the soft fall of slippers on my stairs." He started up, placing his hand to his ear, and listening with painful eagerness. "The carriages are dashing up, whole lines of them. Hark to the coachmen! Where are the police, that this quibbling and quarreling should take place before Sir Dickson Cheffinger's?"

He was no longer bent, no longer the careworn, troubled creature she had seen, but erect as one of the nobles of that court the *Grand Monarque* rendered proverbial for its elegance. He opened the door with dignity, and received noble compatriots with grace, leading each haughty aristocrat to the footstool of the princess, and bowing low before each beauteous dame, to avoid treading upon whose costly train he would skip for half a yard. To Lena, who saw nothing but the miserable untidiness of the dirty, musty chamber, and the courteous gentleman exercising himself in this fantastic fashion, it was an exhibition that would have moved her to tears, had she not foreseen that such a course would make him more miserable than herself. She, therefore, bowed in return to each imaginary personage, and acknowledged the pretended homage of the noble guests with as great suavity as though to the manner born. It lasted for perhaps half an hour, when Sir Dickson, standing upon the landing, called out, "Close the entrance doors; our chambers are thronged; we can receive no other guests without serious inconvenience. Place their cards upon the salver in the hall, and convey our thanks for the honor done us."

Below, a poor seamstress at her work stopped her sewing-machine to listen. No smile or coarse unfeeling word came of it, but a shade of pity, as she thought, perchance, of her father, whose brain, overtaxed by work and worry, had failed him, when money was sorely needed in the house to fight the wolf at the door.

And a man with pallid cheek, and a fearful lustre in his sunken eyes, writing, with aching head and heavy heart, heard the call, and murmured, "It's the poor mad gentleman up stairs; but he is happier far than I."

And a widow painting illuminated ball and dinner programmes, heard with a ghastly smile, and thought it the proper accompaniment to her present labor. And the landlady also heard him, and sipped her gin with a chuckle; for, being weak in the head, she had taxed him heavily for the few comforts he enjoyed. And down in the horrid depths the timorous maid heard and shivered and shrank, looking under the sink and in the coal-hole, and vowing to acquaint her lover, the butcher-lad, that she was not going to remain "in a house as was haunted."

Sir Dickson went into his room again, hurriedly spread a newspaper upon the table, brought from the spider's happy hunting ground three plates, each piled with cold scraps, the remains of former banquets, and an old cracked tea-pot of that autumnal-tinted ware more remarkable for its cheapness than its elegance. This utensil contained cold tea—the landlady letting her fire out at five o'clock, the poor gentleman was compelled to make him sufficient, before starting upon his travels, to supply him upon his return. It was sorry hardship coming back to such cold and cheerless fare, and sorely he felt it, for he was not so far gone as that. He was exceedingly sensitive, and suffered in proportion; still, he endeavored to make light of it, set somebody of note opposite to him, poured out the quantity that would be taken by the most elegant of little services, handed the three huge cups with dainty gallantry, and sipped his tea with exquisite relish, running on all the time with delicious unconcern upon the family histories of first one and then another of those noble guests met together at his board.

To have refused a cup of tea would have been to seriously wound Sir Dickson's *amour propre*. Lena graciously accepted the horrible mixture, unabashed by the stern military gaze of the Duke of Cambridge supposed to be sitting opposite. Sir Dickson, busy with his scraps, apportioned them with the utmost ceremony, and applied some of the most high-sounding names Lena had ever heard given to provisions in her life.

Like all fashionable little teas, this was not prolonged to the wearisome time natural to common folk, and Sir Dickson Cheffinger cleared away. It would be interesting to know where the fine line was drawn, but it is certain that after he had washed up in the toilet basin, not one of the noble guests remained, and he seated himself at the table with as commonplace an air as any mechanic in her Majesty's dominions. Leaning head on hand, he was for a time lost in thought, then looked up at the tired little face before him. All its classical perfection and slight shadowing of haughtiness vanished before the fatigue and exhaustion of this sudden interruption of the quiet, uneventful life. Then Sir Dickson said, with solicitude,

"I am thinking where to accommodate your highness. I have no apartment disengaged, and I know the hotel to be full; there is no other way than to ask your acceptance of this chamber."

"And you—what will you do, Sir Dickson?"

"Take my fitting post, your highness, without your chamber."

"You mean you will sleep on the mat?"

"Where the mat ought to be," he corrected her; adding simply, "Ay, I will sleep there, or, like the true knight you would wish there, will watch until the dawn. Some of my guests walk in their sleep, I think; there is great noise sometimes in the silent hours."

"No, Sir Dickson," said she, firmly; "you shall help me to find some comfortable lodging. I will never turn you out of your own room thus; nay, no remonstrance; as our liege knight, your first duty is obedience."

He bowed low, and accompanied her silently down the dirty stairs, into the quiet street, crossing one of more pretentious appearance, where two rows of lofty houses scowled and showed their teeth all through the night. Then passing along a broad thoroughfare where hotels flaunted rows of lights and bore singular names upon their portals, they wandered into a disreputable quarter, where the houses of entertainment were rented by low and unprincipled French. One innocent as the other, and neither aware how near peril one may be in London.

"Sir Dickson," the girl thought well to say, "it will be best not to acquaint the people with our rank."

He therefore accosted a closely shorn individual upon the steps of one of these hotels, and simply inquired if a bed-chamber could be had for a lady. The shorn one lazily dragged his bulk the length of a passage, where a glass partition, sliding aside at his bidding, disclosed a wrinkled face, daubed with paint and encircled with a garland of poppies. Having conducted the two thus far, the shorn one left them, and returned to the portals. The lady of the poppies bobbed and waited; the gentleman explained; the lady of the poppies demanded "*cinq chelin.*" The gentleman informed his young charge that he thought five shillings were required, and he had left his purse in the escritoire, when Lena at once produced her own, and paid the requisition. The lady with the garland rang, and a maid of brazen attractions glided up to them, bearing a brass candlestick. Standing upon a stair, Lena gave her hand to Sir Dickson, who touched it ever so lightly, ever so reverently, and watched wistfully the retreating figure of the spirit that had stolen upon his story like a ray of sunlight.

"Be with you in the morning," she called down to him, where he stood bare-headed, loyal to the last.

Then he walked slowly away, a little mystified by it all, but still somewhat cheered and encouraged. Back to that dull lodging—it did seem dull now, and he could not people it; he sat down thinking too much of her; and from that he thought of his errand, and of the progress they were to make together.

Lena's guide paused at a door numbered 23, and entered; then courtesying, placed the candlestick upon the table. Supposing it for recompense, the child satisfied her and was left alone. She locked the door, looked under the bed, in the cupboard, and behind the table; and having done this felt tolerably safe; then, throwing herself, just as she was, upon the bed, tired out and sleepy, with a fond last thought of St. Aubyn, and a "Good-night, dear," spoken as usual, passed off to sleep. She slept for an hour or more, when the noise of quarreling awoke her; there were rough words interchanged in an unknown tongue, shuffling of feet, and echoing of heavy blows. Thoroughly alarmed, the child sprang from the bed; without a candle, there was yet sufficient light proceeding from the street to define the interior of her room, and she made for the door without an instant's hesitation. The combatants were in the adjoining apartment, and the partition seemed to be nothing but lath and paper, and the child expected each moment to see one or other of the struggling brawlers come crashing through. The conflict raged yet fiercer, and Lena, to whom this, one of the delights of social intercourse, was foreign as the disputants, could endure it no longer, but fled down stairs, and out at the door, to the great astonishment of the shorn one, who was closing for the night. She hastened from the quarter altogether: the din of that discordant warfare fell rudely upon the ears attuned all life long to such different sounds.

She knew not which turning to take, but tried to find the way they had come: she felt she would be more safe near him. Alas! streets were so much alike, and she was so ignorant of the locality, it was impossible to retrace her way; he had not told her the name of the street or house, nor had she, in the busy press of other thoughts, asked the important question. When morning came it would be as bad. How would she find her friend again in all that maze of streets? The tears started to her eyes as she saw the shutters closing in each lighted home, and heard bolts drawn sharp, as if to keep all such forlorn ones out in the chilly streets. Who now will help the one ewe lamb, all day watched over? Could St. Aubyn, who loved this helpless innocent, but look upon her now, wandering amidst the homeless as homeless as any!

She could not find the street, or discover any one to whom she could tell her tale; all looked so unpitying or so wretched.

Before her, in the gas-light, was a hoarding gay with colored pictures and huge letters. She did not understand them any more than she understood why the child, shoeless and unkempt, stood below there selling cigar-lights at a half-penny. Every fresh poster displayed in the metropolis is criticised with an amount of interest by the vulgar equal to that aroused among the refined by the Academy. The walls and hoardings are the art galleries of the poor; the beggar, tired of tramping the bare bleak tracts beyond the city walls, hails sight of these, and feasts eyes upon their show of color. And this pale traveller, so suddenly aroused from slumbering away her fatigue, stood below there, gazing up with wonderment, while the houses closed, and she was all uncertain which way to turn. Her lips were pressed close with a sort of desperate sadness, a despairing longing to be back at home. And the heart was heavier than the God of the outcast deemed well; for a poor man, upon his way home, spare, uncomely, stooped over her with a chivalry that refined all the roughness, and made him every inch a gentleman. Was she ill, or had she lost some one? Too honest to acknowledge the one, too timid to admit the other, she only shook her head, leaning upon the hand-rail before the hoarding; and he went on his way regretfully.

What clatter of vehicles and rude jostling of the passers-by! How heartily she wished herself away, even upon that quiet Yorkshire road of the morning, when the good wife's kindly welcome to her wooden bench seemed, from this noisy distance, of a wondrous sweetness! Truly she would not want to see the world again for some time to come.

These brown, dingy lines of houses, and frowning fronts of dreary streets, were chilling and painful, holding out no welcome; nay, repelling from the very door-steps.

A woman passing with an infant noticed the pale, frightened look of the girl, and with great kindness inquired if she had lost her way. And Lena answered her "No," thanking her warmly, however, for the kind tone touched a tenderer chord. "It's little enough I've done, goodness knows," the woman said, with feeling. "If we're not kind to one another at this time o' night, I'd like to know when we could be? But some people are kindest when there's lots o' sunshine; they seem to need that to draw it out on 'em." And she too walked on, and the child was again alone. The woman had recalled her own youth, her own coming up to London, and before that life began, at a pretty cottage far away a sweet home broken up. She remembered the ivy, thick on the walls, and the wild-rose forest at the rear; the lavender-trees below the windows, and the clematis bower at the porch; the mossy tiles, with embroidery of lichens all the sloping length; the shady elm by the well near the apple grove; and the holly hedges, thick all the snow time with garniture of winter's jewels. This fair young face had called back that picture, as a face sometimes will, and when the woman went on her way still thinking, it was like leaving the glad old time behind.

And Lena stood wondering why these people spoke to her, not knowing how impressive her beauty was, how visible her innocence—strange and uncommon, doubtless, both of them, at all events by midnight lights.

Walking on, she came to the stone pillars of a building, imposing by reason of its spacious architecture; the poor, sitting about, made room with the native fellowship of the outcast. One old woman ventured to touch with her horny hand the raveled skeins of auburn hair; it was something of a revelation to the decrepit dame, and over the next pinch of snuff she wondered what order of being this was. Were the flesh, and the blood, and the skin, and the limbs, of another mould? And she thought the preacher once heard at a crossing where three ways met, had not told them quite the truth when he said that we all were one. Then a brusque sailor looked aslant upon the pretty face of the fair wanderer, and thought of the long journey from the Docks, over leagues of land and water, where none like this were found, but where drear snow met waves as white, and died upon their passionate bosoms; and that he'd go the safer and better for a kiss from the mouth like a wreath of flowers. And an old Jew broker passing, one used to dangling gems for cursory appraisement, catching the ravishing glitter in the large eyes, took a quiet oath by his patriarch that no diamond had ever flashed like these.

To Lena, who had more than the average share of poetry in her composition, this night scene was the most wonderful she had witnessed. It contrasted so strikingly with the grand silent nights upon the cliff, where the only music had been hoarse rumbling of the German Ocean, and the only lights the stately stars, or the tapers the master had lighted on dark nights of storm, until the windows were aglow, and the mansion became the beacon of that coast.

This was as new to her as the dainty device of the playwright to the child who visits pantomime for the first time, and sits enchanted before that triumph of artists. This also was a fairy realm, although the grotesque side of it. True, it was not the season when the English *infra dignitatem* coldness thaws to the warmth of chandelier and sunlight, and the crowd of rosy faces; when the white-haired guardian of some boisterous troop surrenders with compliant grace to the mirth of the buffoonery, and with splendid companionship becomes even as one of their years; such have a charm that is all and entirely their own, more manifest to the children some thirty years ahead, when not all their winning ways nor all their grateful memories will replace lost faces, or make the circle of home again complete. Not the season when the huge doors before which she is now resting are open, while a throng of little ones pass to the carriages, when white-gloved hands grasp the programme as though clinging to a shred of their Elysium, and red or white hoods cover up the golden tresses, so that such as this poor child see only a straggling curl or two. Then there are peeps of blush-rose throats, with a cross of diamonds or locket of chased gold with pearls, and young gallants who look all lovingly to the care of their sweet girl-charges; but it was all very dead and gloomy just now, with the lamplight wind-blown and flickering, and these destitute ones cowering; it was all a masquerade thus far, this experience of the city's night side. Considering the surroundings, nothing could well be more strange to her. That great edifice rearing like a mausoleum, the pillars casting sullen shadows vault-like and chill, where the ghouls of ancient memory hunting grim echoes of tragedy still haunted the area. The glamour of the lights, itinerant vendors taking up their stand for the night, like wizards by unholy fires; houseless Bohemians idling past the building with a shiver, thinking of the work-house or the jail; dog starvelings that came to her side with a pitiful look, lean horses plodding home, children from reeking courts, who found more shelter beneath the pillars of old Drury than where their drunken kin caroused and fought; women, like shadows—bodiless, soulless, only the tormented spirit left urging them to the black and ghastly stream. All strange, most strange! She moved away from the place.

Opposite to her was a shop still open, with stale cakes, dry buns, dirty sweetmeats, and chocolate in the window; she entered, and a loathsome rabble hailed her with yells of delight. She stood by the counter, where an unclean Italian was spooning pink and yellow garbage from a can. "Lemon or strawberry cream?" he asked. She did not understand, but inquired if she might stop there for the night, a question that stirred the rabble to wilder merriment. Springing to their feet, they were as a gang of fiends released; seizing the shrinking girl, they dragged her to the inner room—a place of nameless abominations. But here the spirit Lena had inherited from her father and mother, and of which we have caught an inkling before, stood her in good stead; for, with all her ignorance of things and innocence of wrong, she possessed an innate dignity that at times flamed savagely as a red-skin's; and now, doubling her fist, she laid about her vigorously, and released herself from the assailants before they had recovered their surprise at her spirit. Like most frequenting these dens, they were young, but none the less malicious in a posse, and she retreated before the fierce retaliation that seemed imminent. Fortunately a police-officer was near by, and he at once ordered the dealer to close for the night. Lena, taking advantage of the circumstance, stole down the quietest street at hand; it was Wellington Street; and thence, by Tavistock and Southampton streets, she came into Covent Garden.

CHAPTER XXX.

COVENT GARDEN.

She has wandered into Covent Garden, and here will pass the night; for it is quieter, and there is a something about it, even at this hour, reminding her of the pleasant country ways.

She feels this, not knowing that here upon this one pastoral bit of the metropolis is to be seen the pageant of life at a glance; that here is life, real life; taking the revolution of hours. Buds and blossoms, wild and hot-house flowers, fresh and faded. Here are characters curious and quaint. Some of the hardy sort and sturdy; some of quiet ways and by-paths; some of sunless tracts, narrow alley growth, fungi of dim courts and the waste; some of gas life, forced; some dried, between the leaves of trouble-days; some with poem life, fold within fold; others nursing sweet life soft as the thistle's down; some rough and rugged, others like sunshine making light of all things: verily here is life, a whole procession of the race to pass before the child, going this round of Covent Garden.

Midnight tolls from the church of St. Paul, west of the market, with its Tuscan portico; which between the starlight and the gas-light flickers to a weird archness the fantastic Inigo himself never dreamed of. This front of the ancient fane is classical: upon hustings beneath its shadow Fox harangued, Beau Sheridan's wit flashed brilliantly, and Burdett thrilled the Garden. And this silent plot, this grave-tract girt by walls, which it seems even London's din can not disturb, bears ashes of the arts. Here lies Macklin; near him Wycherley, the dramatist of Charles's day, the friend of courtly Rochester, and the Duchess of Cleveland's especial laureate of the boudoir; here they brought Lely, the canvas chronicler of the Stuart harem; Gibbons, whose flowers in many a palace wreathe garden-garlands in yet fragrant wood; Butler, whose Hudibras seems to grin from between the old stakes mockingly on the age of paler satire; Walcot, the after-wit, whose barbed spleen became a terror; and other bones, and London dust of many as great, as good, although not embalmed. The moving shadowy outcast ones there by the darkest line of wall recall the grim old sinners of the Death Dance pageant, wandering round to set to partners; it is not so, but these would give their all—their rattling frames and ragged binding—to lay them low in that quiet grave-yard. See the long lank fingers clutching on the stone, the iron (to steady, you say, thinking it intoxication); but the action comes of pain, that grows of grief, that is born of wrong; and they look up at the old church cursingly. The great calm thing mocks, jeeringly; it has seen the peoples pass and the world grow gray; you would think it would topple, pitifully, at witness of the saddened lives that haunt with spectral regularity its precincts. Tush! When has the Sphinx dropped tears for all the Nubian misery that has crouched beneath its shadow? The poor of the lands, and the cities of the lands, learn first, learn last, that stone is stone.

That? A haggard and white little face, looking up with a terrible sadness; the limbs uncared for from the birth, all the life a moan, and it shrinks here, and when the stars come forth singles one, ever the same, 'tis the only love it knows from dawn to eve of every year; and when stars too are hidden, buries face in knees bewailing with quiet grim anguish. No Garden of Eden this to such worn folk. There is no need to pass between it and the star-line, breaking the one ray ever entering that soul, and—be careful of that basket of pompons; they are not fresh; drabbled, indeed, by weary trailing in the rear of purse-strings, but they represent a stock in trade, and so are worthy of respect, we think so much of trade! Little fingers will adjust the leaves and blossoms, and try to earn a breakfast yet within the Garden.

Boom, or clang, which? 'Tis discordancy anyhow! It means the FIRST hour's life has broken upon the city of the Thames!

Not much stirring yet, however. A policeman with imposing step awakes the echoes about the piazza, and misery lifts an ear, ever alert, raises a grimy face, and peers lynx-like; then, while the stalwart figure emerges round the corner, and the starlight shines on the white buttons, the classic helmet, and the bronze face, the hunted start from the ground, from behind the baskets, from portico and doorway, and glide off with shuffling steps, and sneaking looks aslant at the law under shadow of the church.

A boy is seen stealthily making for John, Duke of Bedford's Market-house; he disappears behind the sacks, and looking about discovers an empty one, into which he creeps and lies down, pillowing his head upon the wheel-barrow; he remains perfectly still, and will soon be asleep, for he has been on the tramp all day, and they are disturbed at an early hour in Covent Garden. Painters have no need to go to Italy for studies. Examine nearer home; one often falls athwart a piece of beauty as striking in this city as any thing found in Rome. This boy, for instance, what finer head can be desired? The contour is symmetry itself; below the matted curls the brow is broad as the white splendor of your own darling's, of which you think so much as you hold the little one toward you, and proudly lift it on your knee. It is a little king, with all the intellectuality of the ancients, and girt in purple and fine linen of the moderns. And this! A beggar beauty scarce worthy your regard. Years since there was a man of Florence who daubed gaudily grand studies, making a name as canvas names are held; his *atelier* became the rage, and men and women crowded it, eager for each new face; and it was rumored he had been for long engaged upon a grand boy head, for a study he called the "Eldest born of Cain;" and when, after long months, this was bared to eyes of critics and disciples, such a head was seen as no poet dared conceive. "It is a grand conception!" they said. He turned with a sad smile from his picture. "I tried to make it so, for the son of Cain; but failed miserably, and had to fall back again upon the alleys of our city. It is a life copy, that is all!" And this old city of London is full of such, but we allow the rags and the dirt to prejudice. That highly popular bulb the hyacinth passes through some such stage, and it is certain the lily is nowhere as beautiful as in the mossy mould of its own wild woodland valley.

Take now the southeast angle. That sober-looking old block is the Hummums, one of the super-genteel hotels of London. The young man rolling past can not be going there. He is tall, and of the sporting variety; a crimson satin tie, and bulky watch chain, a cut-away coat, and slight cane with dog-head top, are the properties; he singeth, but the rhythm is irregular; he jolts his low-crowned hat all upon the skew, and leers and winks at the stars as though they were bar-maids; he flutters and waves a handkerchief heavy with perfume of the jockey-club; he encircles a lamp-post with his arm while inquiring the way to the central arcade, as he thinks he will buy a bouquet; he stumbles over baskets, and swears they are drunk, tells a post in confidence that he has been to the Alhambra, and wants to finish up the night at Evans's; he picks up a cabbage stalk after various ineffectual attempts, and fixes it jauntily in his button-hole, vaguely defining the thing as a "cam-camemelia!" An old woman, crooning over a chestnut-brazier, watches the progress of this young man with a grim sort of philosophy.

One—TWO! Hark, how the clocks catch the ripple, and echo back—St. Bride's, St. Dunstan's, St. Mary's, St. Clement Danes, St. Anne's, St. Martin's, the Temple, and the Chapel Royal—all the cordon of steeple and tower.

Odd-looking loungers are seen here and there, near the entrance to the Opera-house, and we wonder what on earth they are doing! They are divisible. Stand by this pillar—not as though watching, for they are queer customers, and all the holy folk that walked the garden when St. Peter's Convent stood hereon could not save us from an ugly thrust if they suspected espionage. Observe those ruffianly fellows with the shaggy heads and piercing eyes; they are scrutinizing every flag for flotsam and jetsam; there are rich finds here sometimes. Those leaning against the stone-work do a melancholy prowl between this range and Bow Street, always near the theatre; they love it; if they can pick up a job that takes them away, they return to it. Paupers, this bound is home! Houseless, the great building is their haven! Shreds of programme telling of lyric drama, and mighty names taking part therein, are treasures when never a morsel has been near the lips for long hours. All day they are hanging about; at evening they watch the army of musicians enter, sometimes touching with more than reverent hand a violin case as the men brush past; then to the *artistes'* entrance, holding in their opinion the close carriages greater than the Romans held the chariots of Trajan, and looking on the black mustached ones as beings of a superior order, while the scarlet-cloaked grand-dames rank higher than the *noblesse*, who follow next in order of the watching. Why? We can not tell! These loungers may be broken-hearted, disappointed ones, whose altar is strewn with the shattered dreams of a strong ambition that was, perchance, this great house, and the great twined art it represents. Enough that they are the outcast of the nomads that hang about the part—English, German, or Italian—enough that they are not as the refuse are, haunting other tracts, and that they possess the intelligence arising of culture, and in this are poorer than the poorest, more wretched than the wretchedest. And yet another! Notice the old gray-haired, scantily clothed one, crouching, sitting, leaning back to the stone as though it were his last friend; where is the son's strong arm, the daughter's regardful care, that these aged limbs are here this chilly autumn tide? What are the men and women who sleep on down thinking of, that such poor old mortals are left to repose with this cruel comfort?

Come away, and take a turn with more distinguished company in Russell Street. Here stood the coffee-houses of the *Tatler*, "Tom's," "Will's," and "Button's." Here Johnson strolled with Garrick, and in yonder house, or thereabouts, Addison and Steele revised the *Spectator* proofs.

> "Here Goldsmith borrow'd half a crown,
> There Colman stoop'd to write it down,"

and so on, although it is doubtful if the good people whose names are in every body's mouth performed the nice detail legend ascribes.

A cab rolls past piled high with luggage, probably from some terminus. One of the fascinating sensations of life, arrival by rail at 2.50 A.M.! Or is it some secret case of removal in the gray still hours? We remark the wan face by the window. Only an effect of this ghastly light, perhaps. We also remark a child asleep upon the woman's knee, when ours are warm in bed. These London cabs often bear big sorrows, take the year round. It has stopped at a private hotel in the Garden; the man rings; all is gray, the dingy front and dead cold windows look horribly unwelcoming; he rings again. Every thing is silent as the grave; evidently a house where no night-porter is retained, or else the man is sleeping. The lady's head, clad in mourning-gear, is seen by the unearthly light, and her face is anxious-looking and very pale. She instructs him to try elsewhere, and the man blunders impatiently to his horse's head, and leads the tired animal across the space to where a light burns all night, and a porter dozes in a great black chair.

A dog turns over the cabbage leaves and other refuse remaining to the Garden scavengers. These are four kinds: the dogs—a wonderful race; the poor—who make many a savory life-sustaining dish from these findings; the outcast children—who, like the animals, take it in the raw, and nibble voraciously at the second great kingdom; and the official gentlemen of the market—who, with dredge and drag, and shovel and cart, clear the way for her Majesty's tradesmen.

Clock strikes one—two—THREE, and the dog barks: the Covent Garden dogs divide the time by barking at the clock and running round the market.

A man wheels a curious machine into the square; it is upon wheels, and it steameth; it is a contrivance of tin, and it beareth inscript, HOT COFFEE, PIES, AND SAUSAGES. There is a small cupboard attached, and it containeth crockery; from this, having planted his apparatus, the man produces cups and saucers; they are of solid ware, and make pottery music that might almost be heard at the other end of the hushed and echoing market. A pause, then the man strikes his chest after the warming method, ties on a semi-white apron, pokes at a little fire subterranean to the tin works, and plunges a fork into a pan, raising a pallid-looking sausage, which he eyes with the anxious scrutiny of a connoisseur and professional cook. The representative dog smells the odor of that sausage and its fellows, and comes sneaking round the corner of the tin, the proprietor of which administers a vigorous corrective, and rubs the covers of his suite with an old rag kept for that purpose. Two men come in sight, workmen, printers apparently; they stop by the early morning stall and breakfast. A policeman tramps past, and greets the old fellow of the buffet; then come a couple of girls, young but not fair, and looking very like having been out all night; maybe there are reasons. One begs a cup of coffee for the two, solemnly promising to pay another time; they have been locked out, she explains, and are half dead with weariness and hunger. Over the way another stall is making a stand. Merchant No. 1 indicates his rival, opposite, as of more benevolent tendencies, and returns the dregs from the last customer's cup back to the can; whereon the lady who hath not spoken indulges in a volley of oaths directed at this merchant, his can, and his coffee. Acclimatized, he only smiles satirically, and winks to the market clock, which just then goes the quarter.

Rumbling of wheels is heard, and presently a wagon laden high with baskets, secured by ropes, and covered with a species of tarpaulin, turns into the quadrangle; the team is not high-mettled, and the whip and reins hang listlessly in the wagoner's hands. Under the influence of rum or slumber the man does not arouse until a sharp shout is heard, and the custodian or officer of the Garden starts out from some mysterious recess, when he awakes, after a long journey from sweet tracts of field and garden land, the most profitable of all garden land, the market-garden. And now, from the rear of the edifice, tumbles one of the porter breed, and between the two the unlading is accomplished, and the freightage spread in orderly divisions upon the pavement. There is a toll on each wagon of vegetable produce and on each ton of potatoes, which helps to swell the revenues of the market; and the custodian jots down memoranda in an official-looking book.

The first column of smoke now winds upward from one of the early-stirring hotels over Southampton Street way; and, Strandward, the gradual extension of hubbub creeps upon the ear, rising, spreading, with the sonance of advancing waves; stealing upon one with a strength of increase that is almost majestic, every minute adding to it, until, as one—two—three—FOUR strikes, we flush to the voiceful company of London traffic. Wagons and vans, carts, trucks, and even barrows, now begin to arrive in quick succession, and the bustle of the day commences; queer men in aprons and fur caps, rough England bound in corduroy; brawny women with great baskets weighted and overweighted by roots; girls, handkerchiefs tied around heads, with bundles of herbs; master-gardeners early to the mart, spick and span with clean collars; old fogies with odd botany samples, which one would suppose were never uprooted from the soil of this planet; strong, rosy-cheeked lads from the villages, where the bits of garden behind the cottages provide for the pig and the family; little girls with bundles of flowers fair as themselves, and looking none the worse for such early rising; damsels from the water-cress beds with the produce of whole reaches; and sturdy, honest-looking sons of the soil loaded with all the choice fruits in season. Carefully nailed and strawed boxes packed with layer upon layer of sweet things in foreign fruit, and others all jewel-like, precious in snowy wool. A small army of costers, nurserymen in every variety, proprietors of monster graperies, proud growers of prize roses, and artists in melons and pumpkins. The man who considers Kew an imposition, and swears he can grow sturdier firs than Norway; the other man who delights in fancy names for his apples, and has a pear called after every notability in Europe. Here is the gardener's daughter casting sheep's eyes at all the young Colins of the market, and the old woman so extravagantly cross because the favorite public-house at the corner is late in opening its shutters. One or two out-door lamps are still alight, struggling desperately with the streaks of color stealing up from over Shoreditch and Bethnal Green (the poor receive the sun first, sometimes); and in the kitchens and over doorways of houses lights are kindling, and a hurried meal is preparing for those who, with bag and portmanteau, may have to catch the early trains. From a hotel a page runs to the nearest cab-rank; he rubs his eyes sleepily, as though scarce awake; his hair is tangled and unkempt, jacket loose, and cap awry: he rides back with the driver, who indulges in a chilly sort of chaff; the hotel door opens, and the "boots" brings forth a trunk, which he and the cabman throw on the vehicle as if to knock the bottom out, and they indulge in by-play of a facetious order. Presently a maid with a bonnet-box appears on the steps, and mincingly inquires if that clock is right. Cabman having assured her a policeman sleeps in the works all night to prevent any mistake, she trips up stairs and returns with a basket, a small box, and a brown paper parcel, a cage daintily incased in tissue, pin-punctured, and a very large reticule, which are placed with scrupulous care in the cab, and the door closed. She begs the man to be cautious that the horse does not start, and enters once more, returning, after a longer interval, with a cat, a foot-warmer, a large flower-pot, a bundle, and some books confined by a strap; these are arranged in the vehicle, the driver viewing the ceremony with an expression altogether indescribable. Having remarked, "It is quite cool this morning," and bestowed a look of ineffable disgust at the driver's sarcastic cast of floridness, the maid again dashes to the reserve, finally returning with a globe of fish, which, in the endeavor to carry steadily while descending the steps, imparts a cross-eyed effect to her beauty, already unprepossessing by any light. An angular being, with grisly ringlets, and wraps beyond enumeration, brings up the rear; she has a venomous-looking sunshade, with which she pokes at the steed, exclaiming, "I hope yer hoss ain't likely to run away, young man!" Some delay occurs in consequence of the lady insisting upon her maid bearing the aquarium upon one knee, the aviary upon the other, and the cat between the two. A lounger drawn to the spot offers to carry the entire cargo for sixpence, but the lady implores the cabman to drive on to Charing Cross. As the cavalcade departs, one—two—three—four—FIVE! Why, we are getting right into the day of this fragrant and fresh autumnal morn! The Garden hostelries are open or opening, and those of the early business persuasion are in full draw, a motley crew, ranging from salesmen to water-cress girls, being crowded at the bars. Cabs in abundance rush up with those for the morning trains or those for the early market, which at this time is open and crowded; and, judging by the noise and shouting, the business done should be something considerable, and so it is, as all the world knows. It is one of the most sweet and glowing places of business! The stalls of Damascus and high places of Bagdad bear no brighter show of color; all the bazars of commerce in lands away East, famed over the breadth of the universe for splendor, boast no more gorgeous array of color. One should come hither, were it not for the commotion, and read Canticles, or Tennyson, or any other lovely nature-lines that cease of poem-utterance only where the tenderer spiritual light beats upon the stanzas.

Not a quarter of an hour since and all this area was deserted, and now a legion flocks Long-acre way, so varied, we well may term it cosmopolitan. Every thing is here. Italian mice boys, and they of the plastic art, from old Roman courts more dingy and more wretched even than our London ways, where the swart-skinned most do congregate; here come fellows of the sunny land, with glossy curls and eyes with stiletto glitter; lazy outcasts of the workshops of Cremona, hawking curiously carven bouquet-holders; and slight, lithe-handed men of Venice, with models of the Rialto forming vases for colored grasses. Strong-limbed peasants of Loretto, with fragments of the holy house transported thither from Nazareth by the angels, relics disposed of to the faithful about Hatton Garden, London Wall, and other savory districts; these and many of the Latin, rough as when of days ere Attila and his Huns chased their hill-sides. Here also are squat samples of the Teutonic, old grisly fellows who ran the Hainault woods in boyhood, and plucked daffodil leaves for their sweethearts in the fields of beautiful Brabant; and they are here this morning with their threescore and ten epochs of trouble, writ in wrinkles plain as the rings on tree trunks, selling wind-mills and weather-houses, and dreaming this great square, with its mixed crowd and commotion, its ancient work of builder's hands, and Charles Fowler's splendid market-house, is the old Square of Antwerp, where they barged up the Scheldt to buy posies on their wedding morn. French are here, with curious plants and still more curious terra cotta; some with last night's newspapers; one with a tray of photographs, where the actresses are at high jinks with staid republicans, and the Pope lies face to face with the last brazen *débutante* of the Scarlet Letter. Here hails one of Picardy, with pine contrivances all feathery with fern; there a handsome lad of the Haute Saône, with a peddler's wallet and jewelry, old filigree work and Florentine craft, or imitation. Right away by the entrance to the Arcade stands a red-capped Turk, with a tray of scented pink and yellow packets. He has in his day stalked the Balkan with the most fearless sportsmen of the

Servian range; now he has come to tramping London with odd parcels of fragrance, turning up in Covent Garden at 5.45 A.M., and in Bayswater at the corresponding hour in the evening. And yonder is an Arab with rich-hued scarfs woven in threads of gold. Plenty of Irish about the market—few Scotch; but of our countrymen, the English, the procession is characteristic to a degree. Take, for instance, the old man sitting on the up-turned baskets. Already he has cleared, and now sits down, sharp, to drink the can of tea his granddaughter doubtless is preparing, for he must get back to his cottage, or shop with a bit of land. Not far removed from whom, notice the well-dressed man with the ebony cane, a gentleman with a taste for roses; not in the least prejudiced, but deeming every thing else that grows a mistake. He has a charming bower near Fulham, where he cultivates tea-scented china splendor of deep, rich yellow, or creamy white shaded with salmon; he fills his lozenge-beds with moss-covered triumphs, carmine, all a velvet glow, and lake, almost a black. He pats these on the head, and talks to them like children, and when people visit his house, rubs his hands proudly while standing on the hearth-rug, and says, assuringly, "You'll come and look at my roses?" And they go with alacrity, knowing as much about the roses as do the sticks the latter are wedded to. He has a Bourbon of a fiery crimson the Horticultural Society would assassinate him for; and a white queenly bloom he calls the *Impêratrice Eugênie*, of which the people next door preserve the petals among old letters, and put tempting vases on the window-sill, in the hope that he may occasionally present a specimen or two with his compliments. He is artistic, too, in the arrangement of the flowers about his rooms; places dense purple Provence bloom in snowy vases, and dazzling white noisettes in black stone classic cups, of a school when the Sharon alone decked the tables of porphyry.

The old lady in mourning by those crosses and wreathes of immortelle is often seen at the Garden, but never buys any thing else. Her brave son, stricken young, bonnie and winsome, loved these; she decks his portrait with their gentle bloom. The aged have dreams to which the heart, as it grows a degree colder with each silver hair, clings with long love; and she rises with the best, and comes here before work, being only a poor housekeeper in chambers, and timorous every day lest she should be told to go for her slowness. But now she is off; for there goes one—two—three—four—five—SIX. How time flies! Observe the pale, thoughtful-looking gentleman who seems to be buying up all the market. He is a great physician—so great he strengthens life among the poor, and when the day comes for fee and recompense, mysteriously forgets many such little services. Those flowers will be carried hence by his servant (the carriage waits in Tavistock Street), and taken to wan, invalid, flower-loving ones, to whom they will come as angels' messages. The cross old gentleman poking into every thing with his stick, as though trying consistency of mould, has one weak point, one hobby for which every thing else may be neglected, and that—his garden: round this he has phenomenal palings, and a gate of mediæval cast, a gardener specially retained to keep off little boys and slugs, labels on his shrubs which he illuminates in classic characters, and an old man whom he employs to walk round his trees with a lantern during the night. He knows the exact age of the entire family, having bought them all himself, in the Garden; he has the best things, out Clapton way, to be found under name of box and bay, sumach and sycamore, acacia and almond, escallonia and euonymus, hawthorn and holly, magnolia and myrtle, olive and oleander, laurel and lilac; while his rhododendrons, azaleas, and kalmias are famed the suburb over.

The middle-aged man there is on hunt for the most choice *bouquet* of the morning—we will not inquire for whom. Here is a gentleman's gentleman ordering cut bloom for the table. There, a fashionable *artiste* in *modes*, whose *salon* West is always elegant with flowers, and gilded furniture hired in Southampton Row. There, we see a retail dealer in rockeries and ferneries; he also deals in aviaries and aquaria, window-screens, floral fenders, and other ornamental luxuries. And now observe for a moment the lady and her maid selecting the rustic *épergne*. She is very beautiful, and fastidious; the contrivance must be altered to her taste; this coil of wood twined the reverse way, that gilded branch and chain removed for the plume of maiden-hair fern. The lady is an eminent novelist, with a house like a fairy bower, and the sovereignty of an empress. That stout, white-whiskered man has made a fortune on these flags; he is a wire-merchant; has cordoned the gardens, trellised the lawns, and wired the walls of half the noble land-owners in England. The frumpy old lady in spotted alpaca, and a lap full of variegated bulbs, is a general grower of table requisites of the plainer sort. When the old man, her husband, died, there was little to leave save the onion reaches. People thought, out his way, there'd have been a tidy purse of yellow gold. But no; somehow, there was garden, and that alone. The old lady took it philosophically, and planted celery, sprouts, broccoli, beet, marrow, kale, and such like growth; and they thrived together. She is at her post every morning; drives up in that light cart standing third in the line, a journey from beyond Stratford a quarter of a league. The brisk buyer of flower seeds is a tradesman, with two strong loves: one for his family—a small brood nurseryward; and the other for his garden—above their heads, being on the roof, like many a tradesman's garden in London, where marigold on the leads and mushroom in the cellar form the antipodes of cultivation.

Thus the study of the *genus homo* in Covent Garden is as diversified as a pageant of nations. Lena, ensconced in one of the recesses, had seen it all, save once or twice in the earlier hours, when she had dozed the time away.

As daylight approached, and the bustle we have pictured continued, the scene caught her fancy; she walked from side to side with quick, observant eyes, taking in each feature and scanning all who crossed the market area, hoping to see her friend. She might have waited about, looking for him in the streets, but she had a presentiment some central position, like that where she had taken her station, would be the best. Sir Dickson, upon calling for her at the hotel, and discovering her absence, might suppose there was some good cause; would, no doubt, remember she was uninformed of his address; and would think, perhaps, she had wandered to this place, and there was waiting his knightly attendance. This looked feasible; so she decided to remain there for some time longer, and watch these good people at their work—perhaps learn more than ever before in her life! Each hour there was a change in those frequenting the market; each hour some new slide in this phantasmagoria of London life.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR FRIEND, COMPANION, AND SISTER.

Lena pondered much whether St. Aubyn had ever seen this place, or passed a night here. What wonders she would have to narrate! Why, she would return with sufficient story for all the winter through. She remembered Mrs. Brandon had spoken of the *bouquets* to be seen in Covent Garden, but she had not met with any of those choice arrangements thus far.

Church bells are heard going for morning service, and soon afterward SEVEN falls from the tower of the church near by. Roman Catholic sisters enter, purchase a few white flowers, and move silently away.

Lena would follow the direction of the bells she had heard, and enter the place of devotion, but that she fears Sir Dickson Cheffinger may come and go, and the one chance be lost of recovering her friend. She had no very clear notion of the time it would take her to return, but she intended to set forth upon the journey homeward soon after the meridian of the day. And she would take back such splendid flowers for *him*, to be laid upon his dressing-table—a peace-offering and love-offering; and she taxed her brain to think of all the pretty schemes she could, likely to charm her kingly poet-guardian, whom she now, indeed, felt she loved as never before. And she resolved, so resolutely, never to vex and grieve him again; crying a few minutes when she remembered how often she had done so. Lena gave but little time to breakfast, snatching it hastily in the most genteel of the coffee-houses, and then returning to her watch.

Meanwhile shops are opening, and the theatrical warehouses disclose the curious contents of their windows. Here you may play at nine-pins with the ages; learn more of the nations in five minutes than you have learned in a life; take a bird's-eye view of history; be introduced to all the celebrities of biography; and encounter such gentry of *diablerie* as you would not dabble again with, in the occult, this side of the grave. Enter this hotel; the magnificent clock upon the mantel of the *salle* chimes EIGHT as we cross the threshold; an irritable old gentleman is seated before some cutlets, and appears apprehensive of a forcible removal of the same. There is a sense of enjoyment beneath this hospitable roof, and involuntarily we think of those whom never a roof covers, save such as is afforded by the Garden.

A rubicund and genial country gentleman enters, and seats himself opposite to him of the cutlets—to the manifest annoyance of the latter.

"Fine morning!" he pleasantly remarks.

"Don't know! Hav'n't been out! just down!" and he dashes the Worcestershire sauce about recklessly.

"Seen the paper this morning?" the genial one ventures to ask. "Any news?"

"Lies, you mean—don't read the papers, got something else to do!"

"What is your opinion of the Session?"

"Didn't know there was one. Don't have opinions. I'm facts, Sir, dry and solid, pounds, hundred-weights—gallons—skins—dickers—bushels; but facts, Sir, always."

Extraordinary individual this; but in spite of his grimness the other seems amused. The apartment is fairly filled; few ladies in comparison to the attendance of the more hungry sex. A waiter at the door holds it open with great deference, a trail as of silk is heard, then the patter of little feet, and a musical voice speaking endearingly to children, and the doorway frames a picture, fair as that of the Goddess of Morning in the great gallery of the Adriatic; a lady of calm, sweet beauty enters, holding by either hand a pretty boy and girl; she walks the extent of the *salle* majestic as an empress, seemingly unconscious all eyes are turned upon her, her own being bent upon her children. At the remote extremity of the room a white-haired elderly gentleman, in faultless morning costume, rises to meet her, shakes hands, kisses the girl, lifts the boy on his knee; and the lady, with the same quiet grace, takes a seat opposite her friend. The saturnine gentleman of the Facts watches from beneath his shaggy brows the proceedings described.

"Very elegant!" suggests his neighbor.

"Bah! Take striplings in, not me. Don't believe in women."

Now considering neither of the gentlemen could very well be classed under the highly necessary sample of human kind he designated striplings, the point was lost; he would have added something more, but it was not to be; for, as it happened, an individual was leaving at that moment, to whom one of the attendants was handing a hat and umbrella; whereat Mr. Cutlet started up, feverishly excited, and made for the umbrella viciously.

"Beg pardon—my umbrella, I think!" Proving otherwise, however, he kindly trotted back to his seat with the characteristic and sweet criticism,

"Fellow looked so like a rogue, thought to be sure he'd made a mistake."

The genial gentleman pretended to be absorbed in looking at the valuable prints upon the dingy gold and brown splendor of the walls, at the theatrical and operatic portraits, at the rich but well-worn carpet, and tastefully painted but smoke-discolored ceiling, when a paw fell heavily on his arm, and—

"So you are still looking at that woman!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Seems to have taken your fancy, as she has the other old boy's! Fools! Fools!"

This being extremely rude, he preserved a dignified but wounded silence.

"She's only one of over-the-way lot!" the other continued, pointing to the Opera-house, with an energy that nearly drove his forefinger through his neighbor's right eye.

Then he dropped the mustard goblet into the cruet vacuum with a dull electro thud, eloquent and decisive, and rang for his bill (he called it a statement), and this was brought to him upon a silver salver, the attendant looking curiously suspicious meantime: that poor man had already been tried to excess. Now the genius of the office had made a slight mistake, in fact had imagined the two gentlemen one firm, and placed the repast of both upon the old gentleman's slip, a catastrophe that produced volcanic symptoms; for, rising inflammably, and doing auctioneer business with the carving-knife on the table, he denounced that wretched retainer with the outraged vehemence of a Rienzi. The genial gentleman ultimately calmed the storm by settling his share of the small amount.

But to return to the Garden, now bathed in the flood of sunshine, looking quite another place; all the buildings, so gray and gloomy in the night, have caught shade and expression, and those tones the Flemish painters loved. Like an arras of gold the sun lies spread upon the walls; the windows gleam a retinue of burnished shields; and here and there an antique chimney gable comes into view, lending the harmony of an old-world town. The flowers and the shrubs glow with fresh sweet hues, and look as though they had bloomed specially to be admired, so resplendent do they appear, and so coquettishly enfold their hidden charms. All through London there is fragrance which the sun has drawn of these, and it is as incense laid upon the altar of the City. Hard-lined faces, and features writ with reminiscence of pain, catch the sun-gleams, and the reminder of their dear old country ways; and smiles curl upon wan lips, jewel-like upon the days that are dead. And as the pleasing and animated scene is at its height, one—two—NINE, clangs forth to call the sluggard exquisites of Western chambers to emerge into the sunshine and the world's fair of flowers.

A small voice invites a by-stander to have his boots blacked. Yes. He is not partial to the curb, but stands, pelican-like, a while, for he looks rather disreputable after a long pilgrimage, and in this japanned age the individual with unpolished leather is very much of a pariah. He addresses the impromptu *valet*, who scratches at a spat of London mud with a sort of affection, as though almost irreverent to remove it, and looks up with sloe-like eyes all the rough City life can not rob of their beauty. Terribly *outré*, to see beauty in the eyes of a shoe-black!

"Do you find the Covent Garden beat pretty profitable, my boy?"

"Like every other, varies, Sir." Philosophy.

"What do you average a day?"

"It's more when the big house is full; the chorus gents stop for a shine going in to r'hearse." Calculation.

"Still you find the people who come to the market good customers?"

He shakes his head contemptuously, or disconsolately, it is difficult to tell which.

"The gentlefolks has theirn done afore coming, and the dealers don't have 'em blacked at all."

Judging from some of the domains we have seen, and pursued the gentle rabbit over, it would be of little avail: our glorious soil possessing, among its other virtues, that of sincere attachment. The public, meantime, gazes upon the ceremony with the admirable curiosity customarily bestowed upon those undergoing ordeal by shoe-blacking; the English people have an objection to any enlightened fellow-creature standing upon one leg if he has two to stand upon, and evidently regard the institution as a revival in modification of the classical pillory.

A woman with a brood of half-clad young, singeth for bread; he has no change, or he would assist that woman; the stereotyped three half-pence in his pocket, he feels, belongs to the urchin at his feet: labor hath its dues. But then the woman singeth; yes, but he has not engaged the vocalist, and he has the urchin. Covent Garden ethics. It is a very odd thing, whenever we are most disposed to help, we never have any change.

The polishing over, he goes on his way ruminating, and turning sharp, discovers the urchin bestowing one of his coins upon the woman. Phenomenon.

But then the London poor are all phenomenon. Did we not last week see a stern man of the alleys knock down another in a tavern brawl, and then in turn watch a long night-time beside the straw of a sick beggar-girl? Those clad in purple and fine linen may learn of these the sweet union: sympathy, compassion, charity.

By this there are many well-dressed folk about the Garden, and a sprinkling of those whose lines have fallen among silver spoons and carriages. These are intent on rich purchases for the conservatory or dining table, or *bouquets* for the evening, and crests of blossom for the vases, in choice chambers where all the walls are a gleam of mirrored luxury.

And there are others treading the marketway with quick business-like step toward their offices and warehouses; clerks whose only joy is some flower pressed between pages of the ledger, on which they look when all a-weary of the great grim City with its grinding routine; merchants' men from the dark and narrow streets and lanes where baled products rear to the smoke height, men who have some sacred niche, corner, shelf, drawer, ledge, or even cranny between the bales, where they hide the loved *souvenirs* of morning walks that whisper of the youth of the sky that is blue, the air that is fresh, the colors that shame all their dyes, and of the holidays coming with the fall of the year.

And there are pale girls here, neatly dressed, and wearing all the appearance of genteel though poor condition; they hurriedly, timidly pass the tiers of bloom, with great longing in eyes whose lustre has died under pressure of work and weariness.

And children come, on their way to school, and drink in visions of field and meadow splendor, of which they have read in books alone; visions that last them all the morning within the dull white-washed walls.

And the governess fresh from some country vicarage, she comes here with her tiresome train for the reminder by that sweet, faint perfume.

So they pass, each face bringing its own story, each new player upon this wonderful stage a life study of absorbing interest; and TEN is heard quivering on the air, and the broad glare, which has banished all our Rembrandtism, ushers fresh crowds into the thronged mart until character becomes almost too numerous for specimen, and the space is motley as a patchwork quilt.

Take the central arcade alone for study, and here will be found almost every class and type, leaving out the vendors altogether; from the nervous gentleman who is always knocking over the jellies, to the gentleman whose province it is to go about treading upon corns, and the gentleman who gets into fearful states of excitement, and passes a life in tripping over cushions. Of course all these are passionate admirers of flowers, wear them in their button-holes, present them to their lady friends, have no objection, in fact, to go botanizing, but upon such expeditions they tumble into sore straits. And there is the inevitable being who knows every thing—there is positively nothing upon earth he does not know; he discourses largely, giving one the pedigree of every bulb and the dam of every fruit. Then we remark the little old gentleman who keeps twiddling a pocket-handkerchief, and who has so polished at his nose the stump alone remaineth; he turns up every where, a nuisance to every body; in early days he saw an experimentalist at a Mechanics' Institution do something with a pocket-handkerchief, and it was so startling—he having lent the handkerchief—it took violent effect upon his mind. And the stout lady is here whose husband, she now tells people, helped to found the British Museum, to which he bequeathed a case of copper-colored beetles. She was much put out by that circumstance, not that she wanted the beetles—which she was always afraid of—but that she begrudged the case; she thought they might have been sent to the authorities in a pickle jar, or some other convenient utensil. The showy conversationalists are here; an attendant couple whom people invite upon the same principle as they do the lady who plays brilliantly upon the piano, and pays for her supper in half a score of bars. And the lank pale man whose craze is chipping about with a small hammer, as though searching for the original rib. And the naturalist who persists in talking about the carnivora until nervous spinsters creep again. And the gentleman with a library, which he figuratively calls his parliament of thought, and which he has collected on the cheap, from old book-stalls, in dusk hours. The young man who is connected with an association, and who glides through, as afraid of being seen or suspected of vanity; and the philanthropist who commenced regenerating the race half a century since, and who, finding the soil unfruitful, has now taken to vegetables. And there are the distinguished people one meets at the horticultural shows and garden parties of grandees, who hold shares, and delight to be recognized as "Fellows" of something. And the charming foreign lady with the bend of an empress, and a toilet that would have become any of the smaller courts; she is spoken of rather vaguely as the Marchioness, is known to have a passion for billiards, *eau de Cologne*, and dozens of gray kid, and is generally a person highly effective at a distance. And a country mayor with keen floral tastes and faint odor of candles, and also a doctor of divinity, with queer ideas upon the celibacy question.

We have been told that one of the leading comedians has caught his most successful eccentricities of study in this place; that it is a favorite resort and saunter of the profession is well known, and few faces are more familiar to the enviable arrangers of the choice *bouquets* which are a feature behind the windows.

We observe that certain of the company, under pretense of turning back to look at the stalls, are in reality watching that graceful lady in the French morning toilet of striped *batiste*, worn with the elegance and fashioned with the care of a brocaded satin robe. It is the heroine of a famous divorce case that caused a sensation some time ago. With exception of a worn and troubled expression all the cunning of the toilet can not erase, there is no apparent change from the dressy and distinguished *grande dame* of the London season of her days of triumph; yet she has been subjected to no ordinary ordeal, even of the courts. The boy beside her is her only son, possessing the beauty and intelligence of a race famed for both. She has fought in public ways before the rabble for those eleven years of love and music, has stood tongue-tied, a gazing-stock for London mobs; has queened it lonely and firmly under all the invective of slander, and has made content with one small suite of rooms, one careful tire-woman, one love of all the world—her treasure whom it came so near to losing; and she can bear all for this, even though friends and fortune have fled, and this place of flowers looks strangely sad. She notices none, looks steadily to its end, or far in her boy's deep eyes, reflecting fairest blues of the array. She comes to please him, and walks the promenade, perhaps seeing none; and yet, sometimes flushing, when the boy's eyes wander off to one or other of the lovely children, to the tumbled locks of some fairy in high places—blown shafts of sunshine that take his admiration—and thinking of the future, she saddens deeper still; but then remembers it is spring-time, season of buds with him, though autumn in the world, and takes his hand tenderly as she would take a cluster of lilies, knowing spring glides on to summer with its blossoms, and summer to the grave and settled splendor of the autumn, when love returns to its parent, if bloomless, magnificent, with the last fruits and the best fruits of its year.

They are not all Londoners here this morning. Covent Garden is one of the favorite walks of our country friends, who enjoy the show as much as if they had no heavily fragrant slips of flowering land encompassing their dwelling, and as though they had not journeyed through flecked meadows and between hills starred with the vagrant blossoms. By road or rail the journey is flower-strewn; leaves may be browning; moss taking on the faint expression of much color; ferns be drab-feathers in the undergrowth; and brush-wood and hedge-row a tangle of points, awaiting the call to pierce through and to burst to a lace-work of dazzling hue; but the autumn flowers are every where—the poor man's flowers, gypsy child's flowers, that come without setting, blown by contrary winds, beaten upon by broad waters, borne by winged messengers from waste woodland aisles, caught on the thick wool of driven flocks, and floated by tiny rivulets to sloping haunts of the kingfisher. And the mind of the girl whose fortunes we follow turns to the flowery ways by which she has come this long distance from her home; turns to the inclosed garden, that wilderness upon the steep summit of the cliff, where trees grow thick as in African jungles, where the birds come to the crumbs she scatters, and conies troop to her feet. She has tired of this ever-changing scene already; tired of the city she had so longed to see; it seemed useless waiting any longer for the coming of that poor gentleman, who might even at that moment be engaged upon the work which had taken such fixed hold upon his mind; she would go from this market, go from this city, to where flowers did really grow by the roadside, where the simple cotter's wife would make her more welcome than she could possibly feel alone in this vast metropolis. No one could love flowers more truly and more fondly than herself, and she could spend all day among these; but the day was far advanced, and she could not tell what its hours might hold in store. She could not face one of those huge bewildering railway stations; she would rather walk long miles upon the homeward road, until some small place was reached, where trains stop to take up passengers, and where the officers upon the platform find time to say a civil word, and take a little trouble in helping the helpless. It was this the ewe lamb said to herself midst of all the bustle and confusion, setting forth with a brave little heart, and the characteristic determination Mrs. Brandon delighted to call by the name of obstinacy.

She must ask the way, and to somewhere; and it seemed the most reasonable thing to ask for the road leading to that last town of importance she had noticed upon the journey. She remembered it was called St. Albans, and, turning to a market-gardener standing near by, she asked if he would kindly tell her the way. He looked compassionately at the questioner, jumping to conclusions instantaneously, as is the custom.

"Going to service mayhap, and got to walk! Well, it's a goodish bit o' ground to cover, and I'd advise ye to jump up into the carrier's wan, my dear."

"No, thank you," thought Lena, "I've had enough of that sort of travelling;" then she said, aloud, to her informant, "Can not I ride some distance—at all events through London?"

"To be sure ye can, in one o' them cabs; shall I hail one for ye?"

"I shall think it very kind of you."

The man did so willingly enough, and our traveller, blushing finely at her temerity, was soon rushing through London by another, and, as she thought, a pleasanter mode of journeying.

Lena left it very much in the driver's hands where to set her down. She took it as a natural consequence that the train from Yorkshire, having passed through St. Alban's, would return the same way, and felt proportionately nearer home; and when, some distance from London, she commenced walking, it was with a delightful sense of freedom and liberty. No crowds were here to frighten her, no maze of bricked-in streets to bewilder until her head ached; no thousand-and-one things to look at all at once; the broad clean road was before her, and a sky blue and promising as that of Hesperia. Her cheeks flushed with the pleasure of the walk, with the resolution to be *so* good upon return; the image of St. Aubyn seemed to make the distance as nothing, and the miles disappeared as before the leaping of the antelope. But all this created the most enjoyable appetite Lena St. Aubyn could remember, and she began to look eagerly for some hostelry or cottage likely to contain the requisites for dining. With the exception of here and there a villa residence, however, nothing of the kind was to be seen, and to approach one of these with a deliberate admission of hunger was out of the question. She thought it just possible some inn might be hiding its modest sign right or left of the main road, and seeing a boy closing the gate of a turning into a lane, she called to him, with a voice half bold, half trembling. The boy looked up, leaning with a sort of languid grace upon the upmost bar; then Lena was thrilled by the eyes that met her own, by the striking face with its beautiful Bohemianism and tender melancholy; and, moved to address him further, she timidly begged pardon for her rudeness, and was but about asking, would he tell her, where—where. She really could not confess to that splendid boy it was merely a case of dinner, for the desire had vanished; she could only think of that haunting face before her. And the other was as strangely moved. Here was the being shaped of dreams and shreds of poesy, this the face ideal and shadowy, and longed for all life through—the face for friend, for companion, and for sister.

And "Walter Gordon" opened the gate with an inviting movement, reassuring, and very winning, and said,

"The house of my friend is here; I am sure you are welcome to sit down and rest. I have known what it is to be tired and faint myself."

Then Lena looked at him more closely, while gratefully following, and thought how like he was to the description Sir Dickson had given of the boy for whom he was searching.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DELICATE CRITICISM.

A CHARACTERISTIC group, consisting of several important members of society, was assembled round the tea-board of the hospitable Charlotte Caddie, Spinster.

Miss Caddie's papa had been a merchant in tea-boards, trinket-chests, card-trays, screens, and the other things supposed to be imported from that interesting land Japan, inclusive of the fascinating-featured dolls; and the merchant bequeathed the wealth, realized after some years at it, to his daughter, a somewhat gaunt personage of sharp features and keen little eyes that bespoke business tact.

The gaunt but grateful Lottie's residence was her own property. That residence was very comfortably furnished; there was a large chest full of linen, not yet marked, and a basket full of silver, not yet engraved, at least it was hinted so, indirectly, now and then.

Miss Caddie made herself very agreeable. All the sweets of every where seemed massed in that bony frame. Miss Caddie was intensely sensible, would talk of science or philosophy, of religion, needle-work, or cooking, and was altogether an eminently practical person, a small eater, a sweet vocalist, and an utter stranger to the headache.

Seated next to Miss Caddie was her bosom-friend, Kitty Ticklewich, Spinster.

Miss Ticklewich, some years older than her friend, presented a more playful surface to society, and assumed a juvenile and artless winsomeness, seeking to woo prepossession by the guileless vivacity of her manner. Miss Ticklewich appeared in black or dark green silk, in consequence of having sand-colored hair. The papa of Miss Kitty Ticklewich was a saddle-maker, a gentleman of the jocular school, with slightly horsy tendencies. He used to tell his friends he knew he was not a gentleman, but he felt very contented as he was: a sentiment so aptly expressing his character and principles it can not be improved upon. It was known the saddle-maker was very well off, and that Mistress Kitty was provided for; but somehow the young lady had so caught the hue and flavor of the useful commodity in which the saddler principally dealt, that she was still Miss Ticklewich, and promised so to remain. And there was great sympathy between these bosom-friends.

Upon the other side of Miss Caddie was another bosom-friend, and the bosom-friend of these two. This was Merino Bobbin, Spinster.

Miss Bobbin, albeit some decades in advance of the other two so far as age was concerned, pleaded an ignorance of the ways of the world the others did not pretend to. Each progressive year saw Miss Bobbin more simply unconscious and more eager to be taught; there was a confiding dependence upon stronger ones, a plaintive leaning toward the robust and valiant. "Oh, that I had some one to protect me!" was her constant thought, and at times, in spite of all her efforts to conceal it, it was forced by her emotion into half-timid utterance, although what she wished to be protected from never became plainly apparent. Miss Bobbin's papa had been a linen-draper, and at that gentle trade he had contrived to amass a fortune, a large fortune as competition-times went, a cheaper man having had the impudence to open under his very nose. Bobbin did not like it, for the establishment had been noted half a century for fourpenny calico; and for an upstart to ticket the same thing 2½*d.* so shocked the head of the firm that he never rallied, but passed quietly from the counter and the world at the earliest opportunity: the British tradesman being constituted by nature to bear so much and no more. Mr. Bobbin was a self-made man; for, as he said, he made the business and the business made him; and after this self-made man had become a ghost, all the discolored mourning upon the premises was—in accordance with his directions—unearthed to do him honor; while, also in accordance, the best curtains were sent to the cleaners, and put back into stock, the money being of more service to Merino, whose unsophisticated, ingenuous nature would be so easily imposed upon.

Miss Bobbin's mamma sat beside her: Miss Bobbin seldom went out to tea unaccompanied by her mamma, for one never knew who might call, and her dear girl was so unprotected! Mrs. Bobbin was a lady of ample dimensions; when the spirit of wit was upon Mr. Bobbin he had been wont to call her "double-width." Nobody knew what he meant. Nobody ever did know what he meant in those witty seasons; but Mr. Bobbin did not stop for this. He cracked his jokes and enjoyed them, and there was an end of it. Mrs. Bobbin dressed in cherry satin, in fact was unspeakably dressy; Miss Bobbin cultivated a more simple style of costume, something *à la Watteau*, and a combination of the shepherdess and mermaiden.

With Mrs. and Miss Bobbin had come their friend Mrs. Lurch, of Lurch's Tonic Ale Brewery, a rather severe person, disposed to be critical, and sensitive upon parochial matters. Mrs. Lurch kept her brougham, and this gives one the right to be a little stringent; they had all three come in the brougham, while the rest of Miss Caddie's guests had to face Brighton's dusty streets. But Mrs. Lurch's weak point was undoubtedly her cap; this was brought, sacredly secured in a box, by messenger earlier in the afternoon, addressed, "Mrs. Lurch, kind care of Miss Caddie; Please don't shake; Glass with care; Keep dry; This side up." Mrs. Lurch's cap was an institution. But one milliner in Europe could construct it—a court milliner Mrs. Lurch described; but this had effect only in so far that the artiste dwelt in a quiet court, not a stone's-throw from St. Paul's churchyard. However, by whomsoever and wherever, it was daringly successful, was piquant, was coquettish, yet with all was matronly and becoming.

Next to Mrs. Lurch was seated Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle, wife of the great fish-sauce man, pickle merchant, and ketchup manufacturer, to the royal family. Mrs. Wriggle was a little lady, rather sour-looking, and given to sharp sayings, incisive and not complimentary; and, inasmuch as Mr. Wriggle was an extremely disagreeable man, it could not but happen that his lady should display a slight acerbity, always being among the pickles.

Mrs. Josiah Bubb, the lady to her left, was the wife of a silk mercer—a very different thing, Mrs. Bubb was careful to point out, from your mere ordinary draper. The shop was an establishment, the assistants, young gentlemen—not young men; it was a Saturday-closing establishment; it accommodated ladies with unlimited credit; it procured articles not in stock through their agent in the city; it possessed show-rooms replete with every Parisian novelty; it was eminently audacious at excessive charges; and Mrs. Bubb carried her head very high, and thought very low of the Bobbins' common, ready-money customers.

Now these ladies had assembled in parliament for the one serious question of debating Westley Garland, that famous cleric having quite recently been the subject of wide criticism. First, he had the credit of saving Lady Guilmere's life; at all events at a consultation-final at which her ladyship's life had been despaired of, this Minister had stepped in, had desired to see her ladyship, had passed some time by her bedside, and had gone down stairs giving a few simple directions, and then had left as gravely and quietly as he had entered; but her ladyship revived, and was in a fair way of recovery. Next the seraph-like young curate had vanished, and in his place an accomplished reader and preacher was engaged by the discriminating Minister. This was the Rev. Robert Evelyn of Torquay, and the approval of the congregation confirmed the wisdom of the choice. And lastly, the Rev. Mr. Garland had published a new book, and, like every work from his pen, it had been caught up with avidity, notwithstanding that it was a work of but very few pages, and thus expensive.

"I call it taking advantage, you know," cried Miss Ticklewich, wiping her greasy fingers unseen upon Miss Caddie's best table-cloth, "charging seven-and-six for a book of not fifty pages; true, I suppose the binding to be perfection, like all Mr. Garland's bindings, but it does seem to be too much!"

"Perhaps it is for a charity, my love?" timidly proposed Miss Bobbin, shrinking petal within petal after the suggestion.

"And perhaps it isn't, or else why should he publish with the announcement, 'To be had only of the author?'"

"One of his eccentric ideas; I suppose you know he is full of eccentricity?"

"Well, my dear, we must certainly read the book, for it will never do to say we have not read it when its discussion is in every body's mouth."

"I have read it," said Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle, with sepulchral effect, and the spinsters' heads craned while they asked, in a breath,

"Yes? And what is it?"

"Foolery, my dears, downright foolery!" And satisfied with this caustic review of a new work beyond her sphere altogether, the vindictive pickle-lady became silent. The spinsters looked at one another, and took a nibble at the tea-cake, then the lady of the brougham spoke loftily before the respectful silence of her compeers:

"I, too, have read this work, but awaited dear Mrs. Wriggle's opinion before I volunteered my own; and I can quite understand our friend, worshiping as she does at so different a church, forming a harsh opinion of this publication, which seems to have caused so much sensation. And I make all allowance for her warmth of feeling, notwithstanding that Mr. Lurch, being an office-bearer in the church, has taken one dozen copies—"

"Four pounds ten!" murmured Miss Caddie, under her breath.

"It is so charming to be in a position to lend," lisped Miss Ticklewich.

"And having made that allowance," continued Mrs. Lurch, proudly, "and having given the composition my close and unsectarian attention—indeed I may say having devoted an hour to it that perhaps should have been bestowed upon our Dorcas or Mothers' meeting—I think, carefully and kindly and honestly speaking, with due admiration of Mr. Garland's undoubted talent—"

"Pass the muffin!" Thus the lady in cherry satin, at whom the speaker looked with annihilating effect, concluding her preamble,

"In spite, I say, of the writer's acknowledged ability and that hold upon public attention he is well known to possess, I think it behooves me in this instance to admit the truth, and to affirm in all candor that the book strikes me as being artificial, affected, florid, tricky, and as presenting a distorted view of history. I was shocked by a vein of cynicism which I consider unbecoming when written by a member of a Christian church—"

"Hear! hear!" From Mrs. Wriggle, rapping with the handle of her knife upon the tray.

"—And I think the introduction of actresses and people of that class should be particularly avoided by the conscientious minister of religion, who must know there is the possibility of it going into families where the young and impressionable are but too ready to yield to such pernicious influence."

Here Miss Bobbin, who was forty if a day, covered her features with her pocket-handkerchief.

"A little more sugar in your tea?" said Miss Caddie, endearingly.

"Thank you, I will," replied Mrs. Lurch, for it was Lottie's invariable custom to commence with the smallest lump to be found.

"Did I understand you, dear Mrs. Lurch, this book is historical?" inquired Mrs. Bubb, who, as she was going out to tea on the following evening, wished to acquire some little knowledge of the theme.

"Partially so, ma'am; Mr. Lurch tells me, and he had it from the Rev. Mr. Webb, that the circumstances, although never before published, are historically correct."

"Is it written in the style of the late Mr. James, ma'am? We have the whole of his works."

"Not in the least, Mrs. Bubb!"

"Of Mr. Ainsworth, perhaps?"

"No, ma'am; in a style peculiar to Mr. Garland alone, and a style that is too poetic for my commonplace understanding. But my husband altogether controverts my judgment by saying the book is the most beautiful composition he has ever read."

"I should not call Mr. Lurch a competent critic!" volunteered Mrs. Wriggle, snappishly.

"And pray, ma'am, why not? But perhaps you would place Mr. Wriggle first as a literary authority?"

"Well, I think neither on 'em shine at that sort of thing. But Ebenezer, ma'am, has been deacon of the Congregational for twenty years, and under five ministers, three on 'em young men fresh from college, but clever preachers and composers, the other two, gentlemen of experience from larger parishes than ours. In that time, Ebenezer, ma'am, has acquired considerable insight into genius, and extensive acquaintance with ability, and he says there ain't neither one nor t'other in this conception of your puffed-up preacher! For my part, I've no patience with the man, a-going poking about even into houses where our Mr. Jones has lent books and is doing a little good."

"Well, as for that," put in Miss Ticklewich, who also attended at the tabernacle presided over by the Rev. Jacob Jones, "he goes into the houses where the Ritualists seem to have absolute control; it doesn't much matter what or where, he is always welcomed."

"Oh, dear me!" hissed Mrs. Wriggle, while Miss Merino covered her features again, "a little sweetness, I fancy; so *you* are joining the band of foolish virgins! Take care, my child, take care! Set not your heart upon this Adonis of the ways of Belial. Bah!"

"Our Kitty's fancy is but temporarily alienated," remarked Miss Caddie. "When we get Christopher Cricket settled at the High Road Church, we shall see what we shall see!" and the speaker playfully fidgeted the angle of a lump of sugar with the tongs, wickedly piercing the blushing Kitty with her keen little eyes.

The remark was in allusion to the selection of Dr. Christopher Cricket for the pulpit of the church named, which had fallen upon hard times, having been many months without an appointed minister. The people were hard to please, and the deacons made a point of always disagreeing one with another; hence, although men of every shade of thought and degree of excellence had been invited to occupy the pulpit for a day, upon the beautiful system of trial-preaching, they had not before this unanimously decided upon a divine. Their choice had now fallen upon a somewhat elderly yet withal gifted man, who, for the advantages to be derived from residence upon this coast, consented to accept the long-vacated pulpit, and in his heart of hearts designed doing the utmost possible good consistent with the principles of dissent. This gentleman, it may be further remarked, was unmarried, was moneyed, and was possessed of exceedingly pleasant manners; true he was plain of feature and not striking as a preacher, but then these were minor items. It was known he thought deeply, and it was believed his heart was good.

Thus, what with the doctor to come, and the clever curate who had come, the ladies of the combined denominations were at no loss for tea-table gossip.

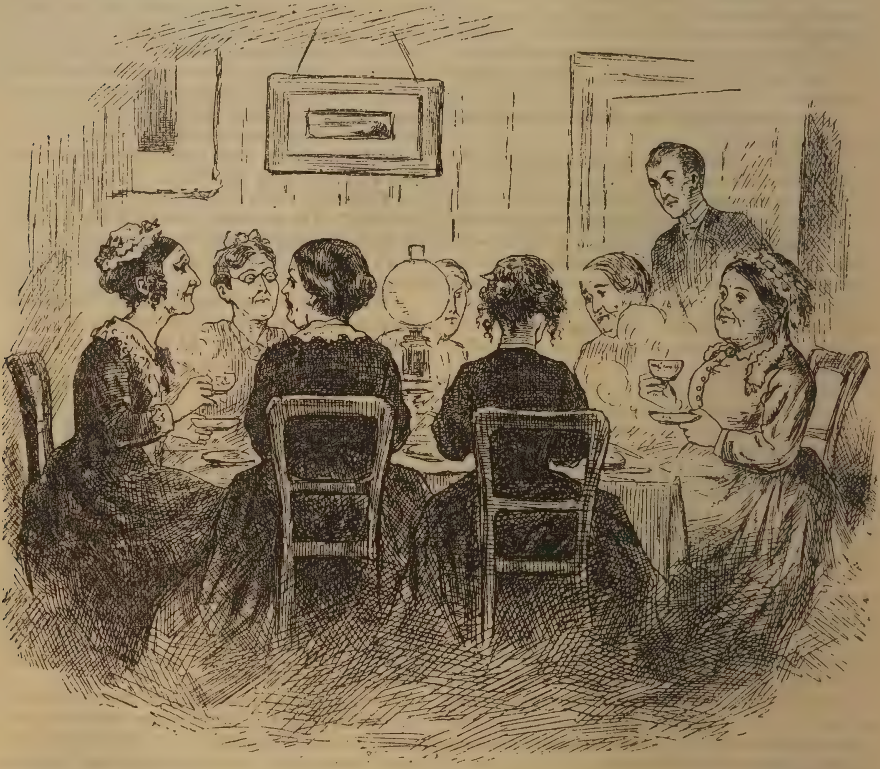
Few of the select little teas of Brighton were flavored with richer tid-bits of gossip and scandal than Miss Charlotte Caddie's. Somehow she gathered and gleaned on the right hand and on the left, passing over no little scrap of news as unworthy of notice, until she became a perfect encyclopedia of all that was past, passing, or to pass; and was valued and esteemed accordingly. It was not the really good tea on the real Japan tea-board, or the irresistibly winning ways, with the perpetual simper upon the withered lips, which seemed to run down the glossy silk and present an endless smile; but it was to learn the exquisite morsels of human naughtiness for which this lady appeared to go about with a basket; and "smallest contributions thankfully received."

Thus this *bureau de scandale* was honored and its directress well beloved: as Oracle, the words of her lips had weight, and it was with semi-official reserve she deigned to enlighten the votaries of her temple. Now upon this evening, Miss Ticklewich having asked, tenderly, "Have you let your house, Lottie?" referring to a small and prettily furnished cottage-residence, the property of her friend, and which had been for some time in the house-agent's hands; Miss Caddie had replied, "No!" rather sharply, and immediately looked straight at the strawberry knob of the teapot; they knew that the Oracle was thinking; that if they did not speak the Oracle would; and there was a death-like silence. All eyes were bent upon that imposingly angular figure at the head of the table, and while each asked within herself, "Who now, I wonder?" the lips were seen to move, the eyes were lifted from the strawberry, and seemed to dwell with infinite pathos upon each face saddening before that melancholy gaze; and then, with hushed, impressive utterance, the wise one said:

"I have been thinking, ladies, of the paucity of materials relative to this Mr. Garland's past. Who the dickens is he? Where the dickens did he come from? Recommended, you will say, by the late Lord Guilmere, presented to the living by the late Earl Heronby. Both these men are dead, and that is not enough for me. Ladies, Brighton has been taken captive, and bereft of its senses by this disciple of polish, this criterion of culture, this hero in lawn—"

"Corded silk!" ventured Mrs. Bubb, half above a whisper; "Bubb procured it."

"Madam, the fabric is immaterial!" And with this reproachful corrective, uttered with plaintive sweetness, Miss Caddie resumed: "It has struck me, ladies, as not a little singular that



"THERE IN THE DOORWAY STOOD A TALL, SARDONIC FORM."

here we have, first, Mr. Garland, next Mr. Webb, and now Mr. Evelyn; and we know absolutely nothing of any of them: ladies, we ought to know more! Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Robert Evelyn? Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Spencer Webb? Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Westley Garland? I ask, who the dickens, who?"

"I CAN!"

There in the doorway stood a tall, sardonic form, whose approach and low knock had been unheard for the gabble. He wore the most mocking cast of features either spinster had seen outside of dreams; he stooped a little, and held a hat by the palm of his hands; he had one long foot within the room, and he asked, with the levity of an alligator,

"May I come in?"

Miss Ticklewich emitted a stifled shriek.

Miss Bobbin retreated behind the pocket-handkerchief.

Miss Caddie bowed her classical profile until hidden by the urn.

Then, with admirable presence of mind, Mrs. Lurch, Mrs. Bubb, and Mrs. Bobbin rose and demanded the cause of the intrusion.

"Tell us, Sir, before you enter this apartment, the reason of your unceremonious appearance. Are there no servants in the house, or are you so devoid of decency as not to understand that a chamber tenanted by ladies, and especially by young maiden ladies, is sacredly private, and ought never, under any circumstances, to be intruded upon?"

It was Mrs. Lurch who accepted the *rôle* of spokeswoman at a moment's notice, and by implied consent of the others.

The stranger gave his long, thin leg a sinuous twist, similar to the serpentine figure rendered familiar by Mr. F. Vokes, and jerkily explained:

"Called to see Miss Caddie—referred to her respecting a house I thought of hiring—servant very slow—knocked—didn't hear—took liberty of opening door—smell of muffins too much for me—couldn't speak—you were busy—ecclesiastics—thought I'd answer—knowing something of 'em. My card—allow me!"

He was by the table at a stride, and had laid the card upon the spout of the urn under the very eyes of the startled hostess before she had recovered herself. The mere mention of the cottage worked wonders; Miss Caddie looked at the card and read, *Mr. Noel Barnard.*

"Do pray sit down!" said Miss Caddie, politely, to her guests and to the strange gentleman. They did so, the gentleman sitting as near to the ladies who had been married as possible.

"I am sure you will pardon the introduction of business into our pleasant midst; I dare say this gentleman will not detain us very long?" and Miss Caddie looked appealingly from her friends to the possible tenant.

Miss Bobbin gave a sudden scream, and there was great confusion. Nestling for protection close to her mother, she thought the gentleman had brought a large black dog in with him! No, he had not brought a large black dog in with him, and order was restored. Her bosom-friend, Kitty Ticklewich, thinking it a ruse, waxed cross, and remarked spitefully to Miss Caddie, "How nervous we are this evening! I think it's the weather."

"Won't detain you two minutes—want a house in Brighton to run down to occasionally—my business is in the City—looking round, struck me that little place of yours might suit; want doing up, improved by a few flowers. Muffin getting cold, pray don't stop, I'll wait; muffin—roll—yeast dumplings—all those sort of things, detestable cold!"

"Quite a domestic man, I declare!" whispered Mrs. Bobbin to Mrs. Lurch, and nudging the sensitive Merino.

"Thank you, Sir, we had finished! May I offer you a cup of tea?"

"You are kind—and I am grateful; but is there any green in it? Never drink green—afraid of nervousness!"

"I am sorry to say there is, Sir!"

"Then I won't have any, thank you; let the girl take the tray away, and we'll get to business."

Miss Caddie rang the bell, abashed by the stranger's freedom. Upon the clearance being made, he drew up to the table, planted his elbows thereon, Australian fashion, and asked,

"Now then, Miss Caddie, let's see if this diminutive villa is within the means of monthly payment by a poor person."

"I want two guineas a week for it, Sir."

"And not dear either, upon my word—and of course you pay the taxes?"

"The taxes bring it up to— Well, yes, I agree to pay the taxes."

"And very honorable, by the lord chancellor! Then we may consider it settled; I take it; and I do hope you'll run in and see me sometimes—old bachelor—very quiet—appreciative of such consideration. Beg pardon, a daddy-long-legs on your cap, ma'am!" This to Mrs. Lurch, who, turning very white, and unable or unwilling to remove that fortress, sank back, gasping for deliverance from the reptile; but unfortunately the coterie was unanimous in its alarm at such long-legged things, and what the consequences would have been no honest chronicler dare relate, had not the strange gentleman taken a stride to the fire-place, caught the hearth-brush from its nail, and whisked off the annoying creature before the enraged lady of the brougham was aware of his design.

"Nasty things, ain't they?" To Mrs. Wriggle, sharply.

"Some legs are too long for any body's comfort; they take parties where they ain't wanted!" and the lady, violently annoyed, turned her chair round, sitting with her back to the bold and officious stranger.

Timorous of an upset, and well aware that no lady present would hesitate to speak her mind should occasion offer, Miss Caddie softly rose, extended her hand to the gentleman, and said, "I think we understand each other."

The gentleman stood up, took the hand, and shook it warmly over the table, said, "I think we do!" and sat down again.

The ladies looked at one another, contemplating the expediency of retiring, when, with an air of confidence, the gentleman said,

"I heard our fair hostess asking important questions relative to the reference, personal security, bankers, etc., of our accomplished friend, the famous Minister. Now, as I had the pleasure of being at college with that young man—or at least he was young then—I feel in a position of acquaintance with those particulars inquired for, or at least with certain of them. Mind, I press my information upon nobody; in fact I have already staid too long—"

"Oh no!" cried a chorus of seven. "Do tell us a little about dear Mr. Garland, whom we all admire and respect so very much!"

"I thought you did! Well, what I have to tell is, that he is in every way worthy the 'much admiration and respect' you bestow upon him!"

"And is that all?" asked Miss Kitty Ticklewich, sniffing like the scraggy war-horse reined in from a pursuit.

"Absolutely all, dear madam; while I was at Oxford with him, nothing was ever seen other than the most exacting must revere and admire." A cloud flitted across the hard face; for a moment Noel Barnard seemed human.

"I never knew any good thing come out of Oxford!" cried Mrs. Wriggle, viciously.

"How excessively unkind, since I but just now said I was there." And the stranger looked killingly at the war-horse, a look which imparted an expression so legitimately diabolic, Miss Bobbin wound her forty-year-old arm through that of Lottie Caddie, whispering, "Isn't he dreadful?"

"Hush, my sweet, how do we know that it is not some Member of Parliament? I am sure he has the look of a statesman!" this aside in reply, adding, aloud, "Of course our friend excepted present company, Mr.—Mr. Barnard."

"Oh, ah, yes, how good of you—defend me thus continuously, and what a divine creature I shall think you, really!" He put up his eye-glass, and looked at the Japanese maiden long and thoughtfully. Miss Caddie, overawed, tried to squeeze a tear; it would not come, and there was a painful silence; then the silvery voice of Mrs. Bubb broke the spell with, "We have been discussing the merits of the new book—"

"Garland's *Triumph of Seasons*—got one in my pocket—capital thing!"

All was eagerness, and "May we have a glimpse at it?" "Do you mind our glancing at the first and last chapters?" "Can you tell us about it?" "Will you permit us to look at it?" "How thoughtful to have it with you!" "We are so indebted!" Midst of all which the gentleman was slowly feeling behind at his coat pocket; when they had done, he calmly remarked,

"Sorry—find I've omitted putting it in my pocket—nuisance too; what's to be done? Step to the hotel and fetch it—"

"Oh, pray don't—we can get it at the library;" from Mrs. Bobbin, who feared they would not look upon the pleasant countenance again.

"None in the libraries, by special request of the author: wants people to buy 'em."

"Do you know it has struck me once or twice, this Mr. Garland is something of *a miser!*" a speculation hazarded by Miss Caddie, who had tried every thing else. "Look at the money he must be making, what with his church, his books, and the lectures! Oh, he is saving, depend on't!"

And the idea seemed to rivet the attention of the visitor, who, with elbows still on the table, placed his thumbs side by side thoughtfully, looking down absorbed by some close calculation while apparently following the mazy pattern of the table-cloth.

"You may be sure he wouldn't work as he does if it wasn't to realize money; it isn't all love of the work."

"Well, I think you're right, my dear!" said silvery Mrs. Bubb; "you know, living opposite the bank, we have rather advantageous facility for discovering who keeps an account, and I do think, now you mention it, I *have* seen the Rev. Mr. Garland in and out more than is quite consistent with a minister of the church!"

"Oho! methinks I smell a rat! Do you smell a rat, Sir?"

Asked by the amiable Mrs. Wriggle of the visitor; and he, still tracing the curl of that designing foliage, answered dryly, with a sniff, "I think I do, ma'am!"

"Catch the Rev. Mr. Jones going into banks; or Dr. Christopher Cricket—"

"Beg pardon, ma'am—"

"Or Dr. Christopher Cricket, Sir, the conscientious Nonconformist minister who has accepted the pastorate of our leading church; would he set store by the dross which perisheth? Would he fritter away his time in and out o' banks? I should like to see him! Dr. Cricket, Sir, is a Christian—"

"A Christian cricket!" put in the visitor, pleasantly; whereat the lady fumed, excited and scandalized by the levity this person betrayed.

"Well, my dear," now ventured the just daughter of the jocular saddle-maker, "I can not for my part reconcile the amassing of money with the good Mr. Garland does in the town and neighborhood, ay, and beyond this county altogether, as is well known; not alone are his benefits bestowed upon charities, but also upon individuals nobody hears about!"

"Hoity-toity! Here's a champion! Why, don't you see, my child, that this is all a blind?" exclaimed Mrs. Wriggle, tossing her head virtuously.

"I don't think taking a new place in the country looks very like penurious principles!" cried Mrs. Lurch. "Mr. Webb told Mr. Lurch that Mr. Garland had bought an old mansion hidden somewhere away in the downs, which nobody would ever pass and nobody could ever find, because the place is haunted, or something."

"Is it the old place they call the Moated Grange?"

"The same: it is at Hawkingdean, the most out-of-the-way village in the whole range of downland valleys. Mr. Webb said that was why Mr. Garland had purchased it, that he might, when so inclined, be absent entirely from the noise and bustle of the town. Mr. Garland is not so strong as some people think, and sometimes, in his studious moods, is very reserved and gloomy."

"This is really interesting," muttered the visitor, intent on the pattern.

"What, Sir?"

"The ingenuity with which the artist has contrived to extricate this leaf from the labyrinth of foliage. But, beg pardon, you were saying something about this new place of Garland's. Is it far?"

"Some few miles; nothing to see from this old house, save another old house, where a deeper student than Mr. Garland even, lives—a horrid old bookworm; there is also the clergyman of the village, white-haired, and stupid with divinity and theology; so that our learned scholar will be in congenial society! That is, if the owner of the Bishop's House—Bishop Bonner having resided there—is disposed to be sociable, which is rather doubtful, for he is a queer stick."

After this effort Mrs. Lurch looked significantly round the room. It was all very well talking like a field lecturer, but darling Lottie really ought to bring out the sherry and biscuits; sufficient time had elapsed since tea, and they would soon be going.

"I thought there was something in the wind," said Miss Caddie, with a peculiarly knowing air, "when I first heard of this clever Mr. Evelyn coming. I shouldn't be surprised if he and Mr. Webb do all the evening duties between 'em. I wonder how the guinea per quarter seat-holders will like that!"

"A sermon of Mr. Garland's," cried Kitty Ticklewich, "is beautiful enough to subsist upon for a month."

"Miss Ticklewich, are you a respectable Nonconformist?" asked Mrs. Wriggle, severely. "Because, if you are, as a communicant at our church, I think it scandalous you should maintain this prejudice in favor of our enemies."

"Mr. Garland is the enemy of no one—not even of his greatest enemy."

The playful surface Miss Ticklewich presented to society, and the juvenile and artless winsomeness she assumed, disarmed reprimand and disabled reproach. The sand-colored hair also was a non-conductor, and all the scathing shafts of indignant anger passed off her, as she said this, with her most killing look, like rain-drops off a duck's back.

Miss Caddie's new tenant rose to go; and, taking an affecting leave of his landlady, politely saluted the others, and departed. It was the signal preceding a general uprising for a continuation of the debate, while going up stairs, upon the quality and presentment of Mr. Noel Barnard, opinion being divided; and for a private word from Miss Caddie, delivered as the *bonne bouche* of the evening. It was—

"Robert Evelyn has a beautiful daughter; her portrait hangs in the dining-room of Evelyn's new house. As I passed last evening, I saw through a crevice of the Venetian blind, and Mr. Garland stood before that picture, alone, and with any thing but the expression a MINISTER should wear upon his countenance!"

There was great crooning, and Mrs. Wriggle was heard to moan, "Belial! Belial!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT EAGLE HALL.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton was fairly settled at Eagle Hall, Torquay, the beautiful Devonshire property acquired possession of in so singular and so sad a manner. Perhaps no man ever entered upon fair estate with a heavier heart; for the thought of his old friend Lionel, and thoughts of Lionel's wife and child, were ever present. Of course the mansion had been furnished with magnificence, and the gardens and approaches restored and improved, until no seat in the county presented a more perfect exterior or interior.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not young; he did not go into ecstasies over his new possession, even though nothing fairer might be found beneath the sun; and even when assenting to this costly furnishing of the mansion, it was with the devout intention, could he but shake off that incubus, Noel Barnard, of restoring the whole, furnished, redecorated, and generally improved, to Mrs. Travers, should that unhappy and beauteous lady ever cross his path. But, alas! both Lionel's widow and child had disappeared; and, like others interested in their welfare, Sir Kinnaird entertained grave suspicions of foul play. He kept these suspicions to himself, but privately caused every inquiry to be made, and spared neither cost nor trouble in prosecuting this investigation, the more arduous of transaction from the necessity for its being all unknown to the secretary.

In addition to being a man of honor and most gentle breeding, Sir Kinnaird Dalton was a man of feeling. Few would have suspected the depth of tenderness underlying that *insouciance* and elegance of manner; and so in sympathy was he with his unfortunate and ill-fated friend, he would know no rest in that friend's home while he remained its possessor. It was a common remark of his, when indolently at rest and alone, "Never mind, old fellow, I will do as much for yours as I am sure you would have done for mine. I but bide the hour of their discovery."

At the time the baronet makes *rentrée* in the story, he was enjoying a brief respite from the annoying presence of his whilom secretary, that irrepressible personage having private business elsewhere. Mr. Barnard was not ceremonious, but went upon these frequent missions at will, merely mentioning the fact of his immediate departure, sometimes not mentioning that fact at all, leaving it for Sir Kinnaird to learn through one or other of the sympathizing and devoted servants. These continuous flittings of the ill-omened bird of passage were always welcomed by Sir Kinnaird with as warm a feeling as the languor of his habitual mood would admit; really he tried to forget the existence of the person when not absolutely in his presence, and succeeded far more readily than in the case of poor Lionel, whose poet face, with its world of thought, heroic determination, and loftiness of soul, was ever before him as he had known it in the days at Oxford, when Beresford Travers's son was king of his college.

A circumstance had occurred the day following Noel Barnard's departure which tended to inspire renewed confidence in the success of his investigations. A day or two before, Hammond, Sir Kinnaird's valet, had entered the room where his master and the secretary were engaged in an unusually high dispute—so violent, the man's presence was unnoticed until he had heard far too much to please either gentleman. Sir Kinnaird was terribly confused. Noel Barnard, quietly but deeply exasperated, discharged a volley of censorious remarks at the man, who proceeded gently with his work, and retired without having taken any notice whatever of the imperious secretary; but after he had gone, Hammond sought an interview with his master, and there and then laid before him that conversation recorded as having taken place between himself and Mr. Simmons, Sir Kinnaird's private attendant, with the connecting circumstances. Sir Kinnaird at once saw that the man, if conciliated, might be of service to himself; besides, he knew sufficient to become an awkward mischief-maker. He adopted the wiser policy, dealt munificently with him, and treated him with confidence.

"You've behaved as the gentleman I've always found you, Sir Kinnaird; and I do hope I'll be able to serve you. I don't say I haven't a conscience, but I do say as people as is looking out for to keep a hotel mustn't have too much! But this I'll add with respect, Sir Kinnaird—and not to mention such things in your presence, Sir—that whenever you want that confounded Mr. Noel Barnard put out of the way, I'll be proud and pleased to do it, if it costs the price of my license for the halter."

To this Sir Kinnaird, with mild reproval, and the calm, indolent sweetness characteristic of him, replied,

"Barnard is a little contrary, I admit; the fellow bores and worries me beyond accounting for with my pacific temperament, but the more one ruffles one's self the more one may, and it is horribly common getting into these disturbed states. I never could go in for phrenology, or any of those things, but it seems to me Barnard was born with a lot of queer organs, and if I am without them I would rather feel content than allow another fellow's organs to irritate me. He reminds one of that man in the Bible whose hand was against every man; but imitate my example, Hammond, and accept it with placid resignation. If people would only do this with all the pests fretting and teasing them, what a deal longer every one would live! Pass me the rose-water, and then a cushion, please. You have much to learn; it is as essential for me to have my comfort studied as my interest." And leaning back luxuriously—inasmuch as luxuriousness was independent of effort—Sir Kinnaird Dalton passed gently off to sleep.

Sir Kinnaird had been not a little surprised and gratified to hear others were in reality engaged upon a similar quest to his own, although who they could be, unless employed by Beresford Travers, he was at a loss to imagine.

It was the day following that of Mr. Barnard's departure. Sir Kinnaird Dalton, walking up and down the terrace of his garden, with hands clasped behind, ever and anon directed an admiring glance beyond the rocky and thickly timbered domain at his feet. Devonshire was new ground to the baronet, and he had not yet mastered the sense of pleasure at its novel attractiveness.

The giant tors that overshadowed the nestling town, that town with its un-English elegance and its prodigality of beautiful surrounding—the far stretch to Totness and Berry, the fanciful expanse away there by Dartmoor and Dartmouth, the rugged romantic coast-line, with its clefts and coves far beyond Brixham and Babbicombe, the quiet, picturesque drives to Exmouth and Dawlish, the splendid semicircle of sea-line, the broken panorama of rocks with their nooks and glens clustered with foliage, the crags trailing with wild flowers, and the vast sweep of greensward, of heath, and of fern, all presented a picture as delightful to the eye as it was pleasing to the fancy.

Thus thought Sir Kinnaird Dalton; and thus thought two gentlemen toiling up the steep ascent.

"Magnificent!" cried the younger of the two, pausing to look around while he waited for his older companion, who climbed the hill with more difficulty.

"Magnificent indeed, my dear Garston; but I wish it was on level ground." And Mr. Beresford Travers stopped to regain breath.

"Then we should not enjoy the view, Sir; now, confess it is worth the coming for."

"That depends upon the result of our visit. I only hope we may find the gentleman at home, and alone."

"He must make himself at home for once; nothing I should like better, though, than to engage in a little misunderstanding with that rascally secretary. Now that I am upon poor old Lionel's own ground I feel so excited and thrilled I can scarcely talk with that cool self-possession I know you like to see me display. To look upon all this fairy scene, and think that through the Machiavelian plots of a perjured traitor—"

"Hush! hush! My dear boy, you are so impetuous."

"Well, I admit it, but not in all things; it is only in any thing concerning Lionel's fair fame. He was my friend. That means so much with me."

"I know it does, my dear boy, and I thank you for him."

For some moments the old gentleman was too agitated to continue. An only son, Lionel had been deeply loved; perhaps because of this the wonder had been greater, the wound deeper, at his supposed treachery.

As they approached the grounds of Eagle Hall, they saw its owner walking upon the garden terrace.

"Dalton wears well," remarked Mr. Travers—"the same youthful, lustrous creature as of yore."

"You see he keeps himself cool and collected, while I am wearing out fast. Well, I suppose if there were no burning mountains there would be no pumice, and I believe scarcely any one would deny virtue to that useful cinder. So that is Sir Kinnaird! I have not seen him before—evidently a connoisseur in dressing-gowns. Gorgeous affair, isn't it? What's he doing—smoking?"

"He does not smoke."

"Poor devil! Another of life's pleasures lost to him."

"A matter of opinion, Sir; but here comes the servant; he has seen us."

Sir Kinnaird had seen them, with the incisive comment,

"Awful nuisance; some people found me out." When, however, they drew near, he recognized Mr. Beresford Travers with considerable pleasure, augmented upon Hammond's respectfully approaching and informing his master that the younger of the two gentlemen was the person who had accosted him in the street. "Admit them; a blessing Barnard happens to be away this morning; send Simmons with my coat; show the gentlemen into the breakfast-room."

Sir Kinnaird reclined upon a garden seat, overpowered by the idea of receiving visitors thus early in the day. He disliked visitors at any hour; but, at an early hour, wished them favoring some other friend.

Simmons appeared with his master's coat, walking upon the grass lest the sound of his footstep upon the gravel should grate upon those sensitive ears. He stood silent behind the seat, holding the garment with a care more reverent than servile; looking down, not to allow of a supposition of rude or negligent gazing. He had brought a small glass, a clothes-brush, a flower for the button-hole, and a morning pocket-handkerchief faintly perfumed.

"Simmons."

"Sir Kinnaird." One step forward, silently; head slightly bowed as implying deference.

"I would give a sovereign for a nice quiet doze among the mignonette, but I must exercise self-denial in this instance. Be at hand after it is over, for I shall be tremendously exhausted. Isn't there a tuft of hair wrong at the back here? Something fidgets me." The baronet looked in the glass, held in a convenient position by the attendant artist.

"Every thing is perfectly smooth, Sir Kinnaird; but if you will permit me to fetch the cosmetic—"

"Don't trouble; always a draught out-of-doors; worst of gardens! I never can understand how the insects get along so well as they do; now the handkerchief—thanks."

It was with curious sensations Mr. Beresford Travers found himself ushered into the room which had once been his favorite of the suite. But how metamorphosed! what excess of embellishment! what lavish decoration! True, the house was the same, but transformed into a palace. Herbert Garston was humming "Il Bandito" from Verdi's *Ernani*, the score of which, open at the piano, wooed the musician to trial of the instrument, when Sir Kinnaird entered and cordially shook hands with Mr. Travers.

"So glad to see you; how well you are looking!"

And then Mr. Travers introduced his friend Herbert.

"Had the honor of meeting your mother some months ago at Lady Huntingtower's."

Herbert bowed.

"But do sit down, you are tired, and it is warm; even a short stroll upon the terrace has fatigued me."

"You seem pretty sound, Dalton; nobody in England looks better, or as well, I should think."

"Why not reduce me to that level of odium, the *bon-vivant* of the club-house? I am afraid it is all very hollow, my dear Mr. Travers, for I am rather charged with spleen just now."

"What is the matter? nothing serious, I hope?"

"Very, to me, Sir."

Sir Kinnaird fell back upon a lounge, the sunlight gleaming upon the hair swept away from the brow, and falling tumbled upon the coat; the thin, delicate face, with its fine profile and sensitive quivering of the nostril, had a singularly patrician look, with all its fragile moulding and femininely clear bloom. Mr. Garston rose to draw the curtain, thinking the light too strong for the indolent baronet.

"No, don't, please. The sun and I are good friends: I am like the ephemera that bask in its rays, and after it has gone are colorless." He seemed making good the words, lying upon his back, looking up at the ceiling, bathed in the broad golden beam.

"You were going, I think, to tell us what this serious matter is, Sir Kinnaird? I need scarcely add that any thing you now say will be received by us in perfect confidence."

"Frankly, my dear Sir, my coachman has taken to eating onions."

The two gentlemen burst into a fit of hearty laughter, of which Sir Kinnaird took no notice, continuing as gravely, "And with my fine sense of smell, no greater catastrophe could have happened. What is to be done? This fine sea air and aroma of the country are lost to me forever, unless I discharge the man. And he is an old and valued servant. It is very embarrassing, very!"

"I should remedy it," said Mr. Garston, "by instructing the cook to bake some, and enjoying a deliberate feast of the bulb for supper. For my part, I admire the coachman's taste."

Sir Kinnaird Dalton uttered a low moan; the subject was too insufferably vulgar to extend it by replying. He raised his head a little, looking at the elder of the two gentlemen. "To what am I indebted?"

"Well, you may not, perhaps, be aware that you forestalled me by purchasing this estate."

"I thought you ought to have bought it, if you did not; but, as a matter of fact, my secretary, aware of my prepossession in favor of this county, and of the sort of place I was looking out for, had effected the purchase before I had time to look round. It is a captivating place, and I could rest content were it not for thinking of my old friend Lionel. Pardon the allusion in your presence."

"We have come to you this morning to ask if you can throw any light upon recent events. I know it does not follow that you can, because this Mr. Barnard is now secretary to yourself, but you may possibly know something of the whereabouts of Mrs. Lionel and her child, admitting no foul usage has been exercised, which we, with all moderation, fear to have been the case. I do not say mysterious disappearances are impossible or uncommon, but it is morally—"

"Legally!" interposed Mr. Garston.

"Morally and legally impossible for a lady, especially a lady of Mrs. Lionel's birth and breeding, and her little girl, particularly a little girl of the unapproachable beauty of this child, to disappear off the face of the earth without leaving some indication."

"And that indication we are determined to move creation to obtain, Sir;" and, violently excited, Mr. Garston was about resuming his expression of opinion, when, happening to glance at Sir Kinnaird, he exclaimed,

"Why, bless me, he has gone to sleep!"

It appeared to be the case; the baronet, like a figure of wax, was lying with closed eyes, and a half-smile at hide-and-seek with the sun about the corners of the mouth; but no, the lips parted, and—

"Go on, please; I am all attention, only I am thinking. The speculation has wandered into an unpleasant region. I may or may not think as you do. This believe, I can throw no light upon the matter; of course they will turn up some day. I can not think where people *do* get to. I passed a man in the Park last spring; gave me quite a start; thought he'd been gone long ago; in fact, read of his demise in the paper; and for a fellow to be riding about parks after that, you know, is a shame. Take courage; they'll turn up one of these days."

To honest Herbert Garston this looked so very like thoughtless, careless, and unfeeling liberty, he was out of all patience with it, and, bringing his hand down impulsively upon the table, he exclaimed, "But that is not enough, Sir; we wish to ascertain the truth."

"You really must not make so much noise, or you will give me the headache for a month!" The door here opened softly, and Simmons entered with *eau de Cologne*, in a tiny dish once the property of Louis the Magnificent. He advanced upon tiptoe to the side of his master, and, with a diminutive sponge of soft fineness, applied the restorative to his master's brow and nostrils. Sir Kinnaird submitted passively, with the quiet semi-apology:

"Don't take any notice, please, gentlemen; this faithful fellow knows how the least agitation disturbs my nervous system."

Mr. Garston, impatiently taking up an album, looked as though he would dash for relief among the Parian gods and goddesses, and give them a taste of the muscular.

The faithful fellow having retired, Sir Kinnaird, with graceful courtesy, although somewhat languidly, begged Mr. Garston would proceed. Mr. Travers undertook to explain their present position, extenuating his friend's impulsive feeling on the ground of his having been bonded with poor Lionel in close friendship, and by the equally close alliance of art and letters.

"At which," cried Garston, with a frank smile, "I made but little progress, while Lionel outshone all whom I have known by the brilliance of his genius and the diverse nature of his attainments. I was much too eager, to study, and my gifts, such as they were, burned themselves out; but they left, I think, the perseverance, if not the patience."

Sir Kinnaird, leaning upon an elbow, looked the speaker in the face.

"Do you know I am charmed with your candor; if I were nearer, would give you my hand. I appreciate a character of this description! Ah!" (sighing) "I have never known eagerness, or gifts, or perseverance, or the other things you enumerate; the only thing I can experience gratitude for possessing is—friendship, true to the death, ay, and beyond the death. I can't make a fuss about it, but there it is, and—Lionel Travers was *my friend*."

The earnest, calm sincerity, and unmoved passion, came forth in the words, spoken with the ease and repose of perfect breeding, yet with the solemnity of an abiding constancy. For the moment it scarcely seemed that luxurious, dainty creature of the sunbeam who had thus spoken.

Mr. Travers, rising, thanked the baronet for his chivalrous allegiance. The old gentleman, last representative of the honored houses of Beresford and Travers, felt his position acutely. The silvered head, noble still, though bowed, moved Sir Kinnaird to supreme pity. He likewise rose and walked with Mr. Travers to the window.

"It is good of you, Sir Kinnaird, to preserve your esteem for the memory of my poor boy, whose fair name tarnished, and integrity disputed, lives but in the choice regard of a very few."

"I don't think so—excuse my interrupting you—I believe but half the fellows, and very few of the outside world, thought ill of Lionel. It is generally supposed he was environed by money-lenders, as many have been before him. Remember when my father died I was in a precious mess myself, and if Huntingtowers hadn't backed some bills, I should have lost my horses. I admit there's awful complication about Lionel's affairs, and I always get lost over that sort of thing; but I shouldn't wonder if one of these days the wind blew them straight."

"A hundred thousand seems a preposterous figure."

"It is large; I didn't know he was embarrassed."

"Nor I; and Lionel had the wrong blood in his veins to appeal to me or acquaint me with it; neither should I have assisted him had he done so—I was too imbittered against him at the time."

"Ay, there was the mistake; Lionel was too much of a gentleman and too tender-hearted ever to have wronged you in any way, and much too sensitive to be treated with the rigor you displayed; but it is past now, and no one has the right to self-inflict torture by recalling any thing unpleasant—at least such is my creed."

"How *can* I make reparation? I shall be so willing, so glad to do so; but I can not see how. I have tried my best to trace Ella and her child; I would provide for both, and thus atone in some degree for my blind and inhuman fault, and at my death Lionel's child shall have the property."

"A noble atonement!"

"But insufficient," answered the old gentleman, sadly. "You see it is an awkward business, or I would pay off the debt; but it would soon be known that I had done so, and while not clearing my son's good name, it would impoverish the estate to line the pockets of goodness knows what usurers and vampires."

"No, you would have to deal only with Noel Barnard; he brought about the entire catastrophe, and has become sole possessor of the claims."

"And can not, I suppose, be compelled to sell?"

"No earthly power would make him do so. One thing I promise you, upon my honor—discover Mrs. Travers, and she is welcome to occupy this place just as it is. I will reside upon the Continent whenever this is agreeable. As you are aware, my mother is at Florence. She has often entreated me to share her villa; once telegraph me Mrs. Travers is found, and I will vacate, joining Lady Dalton as speedily as may be consistent with my usually sluggish movements; you know I am one of the unfortunate wretches who can not hurry."

"What you have offered is so nobly disinterested, Sir Kinnaird, I am overcome. I can only thank you, only tell you how deeply sensible I am of your goodness; but this will be unnecessary. It is now my part, if any one's, to act generously."

Mr. Travers passed his hand thoughtfully across his eyes; the great Beresford and Travers diamond gleamed in the sun; the pleasant features wore an expression of severe pain.

"It goes against my principles and feelings to know of this man's infamy, and to be unable to bring him to justice."

"It is not yet a case where justice can step in; there are some criminal dilemmas best managed privately."

"Yes, myself and friend have so decided. Garston," turning to address that gentleman, seated at the table, "Sir Kinnaird has just expressed the opinion, coinciding with our own, of the necessity for private investigation."

Hands in the pockets of his shooting coat, Mr. Garston sauntered to the window, remarking,

"A gallows, Sir, high as Haman's, ay, and double fifty cubits—"

"Would present a fine view of the Devonshire perspective, Sir," said a sardonic voice, from out a bower crimson with splendor of the Virginia creeper, which parted like ruddy curtains, while the black form of Noel Barnard was seen advancing.

"*You* here!" said Sir Kinnaird, the least shade of annoyance to be perceived.

"My presence is too valuable, Sir Kinnaird, to warrant long absence. I returned an hour ago—found you engaged—stepped into the arbor—delightful, all but the earwigs! Fine morning, gentlemen; Mr. Travers, I hope, is well?"

"Mr. Travers was well, Sir, up to seeing yourself, than which he would rather have the gout."

And, somewhat testily for him, the old gentleman held his hand to Sir Kinnaird, with the remark, "We will be going now."

"Don't let me frighten you away; I will retire," said the accommodating Mr. Barnard.

"Frighten, Sir—you'd frighten the devil!" And the owner of Beresford Court, for once terribly discomposed, passed his pocket-handkerchief over his brow.

"I am not on visiting terms—so don't know. Hope you like Sir Kinnaird Dalton's new place? Very airy, agreeable situation!"

"A word with you, Mr. Noel Barnard."

It was Herbert Garston who came forward, his face red with ire and indignation. The secretary looked coolly at the other, with the sarcasm which, at times serving for weapon, was more effective than the blunter mode of biting words.

"I beg to tell you, Sir, that if Sir Kinnaird Dalton submits to your insolent audacity, you can not expect other people to; I, for one, won't; and I advise you, whenever in my presence, to keep a civil or a silent tongue in your head."

The situation was dramatic. Sir Kinnaird watched with eager interest to see how his impregnable scribe would receive the blunt attack. Mr. Travers looked at his friend with considerable admiration. Mr. Travers could never have engaged in an open tourney of the kind, dreading, upon principle, an upset of any description, or any accident calculated to disturb the repose guaranteed by his years and position. Mr. Barnard sat crosswise upon a chair, elbows upon its back, and, with the most irritating effrontery, invited the speaker to define his notion of a civil, if not of a silent, tongue.

"I will tell you—be you tutor, secretary, or deuce knows what; and may you profit by it, or one of these days you may find yourself bowled over. A civil tongue in the head, Sir, is to speak with deference in the presence of gentlemen, and with respect in the presence of a master; and a silent tongue is to speak only when spoken to."

"Hear! hear!" said an audible voice outside, where Simmons stood upon the mat, first scenting a scene with the quick instinct of his class, next waiting in devoted readiness, as not knowing how soon his services might be required for the delicate baronet, who could not be expected to pass through so trying and vulgar an ordeal as this was without experiencing a corresponding reaction.

Mr. Barnard was looking thoughtfully down, as though tracing afar problems too momentous to permit of reply by mere ordinary jangling. This exasperated his volcanic antagonist, who was resolved upon goading this iron and seemingly invulnerable being to the combat.

"When I entered this house, Mr. Noel Barnard, it was with a devout longing for the opportunity of speaking my mind to you. I have been waiting for it. I am glad I can in the presence of two gentlemen brand you with the dastardly titles of scoundrel, swindler, liar, and murderer!"

Without, Simmons cut an ecstatic jig upon the sheep-skin.

Within, three men looked at Herbert Garston: Sir Kinnaird timorously, Beresford Travers reprovingly, Noel Barnard—the least disturbed person in the Hall—curiously yet collectedly. Then, in measured tones infinitely more dangerous than anger, he answered,

"Perhaps Mr. Garston will qualify, or account for, the epithets favored with?"

"Certainly, Sir—without loss of time. You prove your claim to the first designation by having taken the advantage, when in a situation salaried and honorable, to insult a lady of the household. You were an infernal scoundrel, Sir, and met with your just deserts. To the second, by enmeshing a gentleman, whom you had injured already, in a net-work of difficulty so complex that it brought about his ruin and enriched yourself, and crowned you a most consummate swindler. To the third, by blackening the name of a man whom, not because he was my best friend only, but because he was the purest, truest, most honorable, and most Christian man in Christendom, I will set straight before the world, so help me God! And to the last, from the certain fact of your having been prime agent in effecting not only his destruction, but also, we believe, that of his wife and child."

"Had you been distinguished at the bar, Sir, you could not have delivered yourself with greater fluency: and although I fail to follow the sequence here and there, I have no wish to deny you full satisfaction resulting from the points of the brief. You will remember, as a rule, invective weakens a case, because when an impassioned pleader darts after some lurid and to him irritating light, he leaves the level track, and while returning and recovering himself, opposing counsel possess the evident advantage contingent upon coolness. You are, of course, aware of the homely but apt illustration of the bull whom the red shawl excites in so marked a manner—mind, I am not likening yourself to that rampant yet necessary quadruped, nor yet to that other useful but equally awkward animal, the British Ass!"

"Sir!" cried Mr. Garston, advancing threateningly close to his glacial enemy, feeling that he had exhausted his quiver, "I take the liberty of telling you, who are so partial to travesty of the law, that it is stronger than the most mocking of those who break it with impunity; and that ere long its unerring grip will be firm upon yourself. Understanding the subtle theory of tactics so admirably, you will, perhaps, point out to me the clumsy art when an adversary shows his cards: but I will do this, and warn you that link by link I am picking up the chain you hang about those unfortunate enough to become your victims. Scotland Yard has not yet been taxed, Sir, for a single official, nor shall it be, if I can prevent it, through regard for the feelings of Mr. Beresford Travers, who has suffered enough by your machinations. Alone, or aided by trusty friends—"

"And servants!" interposed the other, with quiet irony.

"By any, Sir, who will aid me in this just cause, shall retribution be brought about. Never fear, Mr. Noel Barnard; a man like Lionel Travers is not to be stricken down by human hand without Heaven avenging the foul wrong and raising those who may be but instruments, yet are all-powerful in Higher hands."

"And yet," said the other, musingly, "I have known the dead serve Heaven better than the living."

They heard, and thought long afterward of the mystical words, unable to grasp any connective significance, or attach a bearing upon their subject.

"Have we done any good?" asked the old gentleman, his arm linked in that of his friend, as they were retracing their way down the road leading to the town. Fair blue above, the splendid drapery of autumn around, the air softly genial and laden with odorous decay.

"We have found that Dalton is our friend, and he will, I am convinced, opportunity serving, prove so."

"Of that I am sure; alas, his power is but weak! He knows more of the nature and history of this man than he would disclose to us; and however elaborate and explicit a case, he would not undertake a system of espionage upon one of his own servants. Wrapped up in his sybaritic ease, and falling back upon those instincts of his breeding, he rather shuns and ignores the man than troubles about him."

"I don't know; once or twice, when he appeared least attentive and most at ease, I noticed a painful twitching, as though himself suffering. Unlike you, my dear Sir, I believe Sir Kinnaird's *insouciance* to be masquerading."

"Sir Kinnaird belongs to a later school, that I dare say occasionally adopts this effeminate escape from the unpleasant. I am more accustomed to a race looking trouble or villainy boldly in the face, and bravely grappling with it."

"More in my way, Sir?" looking at his friend with a humorous twinkle; and Mr. Travers could not resist laughing.

"You go to extremes, Garston, altogether exceed propriety in the enthusiasm of your warmth, and under influence of temporary excitement forget prudence entirely."

"Ah, well, I admit the man did excite me; it would take more than we know of to excite him. But wait and see; there may be a stronger than either of us at work."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEABOROUGH AFTER THE SEASON.

It was exceedingly quiet at Seaborough. Visitors had fled, extras were discharged from the two large hotels, hired bedsteads were returned to the furniture mart, machines were drawn up in line for the winter, humanity upon the shingle waxed sparse, the summer and autumn visitors' seasons were over for another year. It was far advanced in October: it was exceedingly quiet at Seaborough.

The subscription band had ceased to make the promenade agreeable, the flowers were passing away, dry leaves scampered before the wind, and waves breaking upon shore were large and fierce. A line of vacant seats, a stretch of lonely walk, a deserted succession of grass-laid, shrub-bounded inclosures. What dreary places they are, these lesser coast towns out of the season!

Still, people must eat, and drink, and dress—the people who remain, who are there throughout the year, having settled and become native.

Thus the drapers were filling windows with seasonable dress stuffs, with flannels, blankets, and scarlet hosen; while the grocers were clearing away grimy-looking sugar-loaves and other dirt-besprinkled provender telling of the passed season. It was all very still, and there was little business stirring any where in commercial localities; and, as a consequence, the good folks had more time to chatter, and chatter they did. It was something, indeed (as Mrs. Tapper, of the LINDON ARMS, remarked to Mrs. Wallis, the ironmonger's lady), for their great Hall, after being closed, and haunted, and shadowed from buttress to basement by mystery, and made the one show place and attraction for strangers (and every body knows how thirsty that sort of thing makes people), to be occupied by a posse of workmen who were modernizing and refitting the whole place. Why, Sleperton Green would lose its romantic association altogether, would degenerate to a mere village donkey-walk! Mrs. Tapper was disgusted, because it was not to be supposed my lady would have her beer at the ARMS, or my lady's many servants be permitted to resort to the convivial shades of the hotel; at least it never had been so, and poor Tapper, when alive, had often said "as how the Hall was no good to nobody till it was empty." Another thing, neither Mrs. Tapper, nor Mrs. Wallis, not yet Mrs. Rice, the Sleperton grocer and post-mistress, was quite sure it was all right. Where had her ladyship sprung from all at once? Well, Mrs. Tapper had a sister who let apartments, and among other items of news contained in a recent letter (the sister resided in Brighton) was the history of this Queen of their Season; and how her ladyship was sovereigning it in Brighton, without an equal or even an attempt at rivalry; and this in the company of her father. "Now," said Mrs. Tapper, with emphasis, "I want to know where his lordship is? I have always had a suspicion of his being hidden away in the building somewhere, and I do know Tapper one night saw a white-bearded, ghastly-looking figure, surrounded by a pale blue light, and I should have spoken of it afore, only Tapper said, 'Whatever you does, don't mention it; for they'd pull the place down to find out what it was, and we should lose the earning of many an honest penny.' Now, why does her ladyship come a-upsetting the whole place if the mystery about his lordship isn't cleared up? I for one don't believe he's so far off as the very polite widow and very precise bailiff are so fond of making out."

Mrs. Wallis, who had done a brisk business in the way of nails, screws, tools, bars, bolts, locks, and other iron-ware, thought it might do the village good, and certainly between seasons.

Altogether, the discussion ran high, and meantime the Manor-house was undergoing its embellishment and general renovation, curiously watched by the elegant widow and her son, who day by day saw, from the Cottage windows, the progress made.

"So she is coming back!" Mrs. Vincent had said to herself, when the news first came, and the advance staff of artisans quickly followed. "She has the nerve to brazen it out, and to return to the scene any other woman would avoid forever; and she returns as Lady Lindon. There is some deep purpose in this. And all the years have failed to bring me what I looked for—*he* has *not* returned. Would that I knew of his whereabouts, knew the secret of the years! Where has he hidden himself for so long? Where hides he now? I think, nay, I know, he always liked me: was not my sympathy ever to his hand? When he would casually allude to the icy hauteur of her ladyship, and describe all delicately the constant pain it caused him, was not my tenderest sympathy awakened, and did I not ever lend a sensitive ear? And he was grateful. He tried hard as man ever tried in this world to evoke some little affection and warmth in that frigid bosom; but she was ever the same, and told me one day she had never known what it was to feel interested in any one, let alone to like them. 'Of course I esteem Harold,' she said to me, 'his family is so unexceptionable.' And there it began and ended. The creature without family is pariah completely with Lady Lindon; she admits no degree. Well, I can not boast of family, although we were always eminently genteel; but I do not think Lord Harold cares for that sort of thing. He has married into family, and I fancy once in a life is sufficient for a man of his calibre; perhaps next time, for a change, he would rather marry out of a family. But with all his splendid qualities and ideas of the romantic, he failed to come up to my calculation after the blow; and I certainly heightened the effect as artistically as possible, the more easily as he is one of those susceptibly jealous ones. I would have staked my little income upon the divorce; but no, he shrank either from the publicity or from inflicting pain upon her, yet surely did not preserve the ashes of his ridiculous and insensate love. Why, a man with his nice sense of honor should have gone at the case with splendid dash, and have settled the woman forever! And then—have married me—poor little Me, who have bestowed more devotion in a day than that iceberg in all the term of their wedded years. Well, Lorry, my darling, I have vowed that the rooms your feet have overrun so long shall be yours and mine, and, should no untoward accident intervene, I will keep my word. Now this very reserve and seclusion on his part may betoken the treasuring of old recollections, and a painful clinging to sacred associations; if so, the embers of the love may want but little fanning: revive the love, the jealousy should follow; the open wound will make that certain. Get Helen here, alone with her establishment, exposed to all the gossip of the Green, open to all the stings of village scorpions, defenseless before the idle scandal of the town, none loving, most hating, my proud false empress; *then* I will bring down the charming Minister who is taking all hearts captive, and whom, I doubt not, she knows well enough, seeing they share the sovereignty in that town *par excellence* of intrigue and fashion; and *I* noticed how he stood before her portrait, seemingly strangely moved by it. Oh, I will play upon the quivering lyre—his heart—until he is over head and ears in love with her; and then to disclose this second escapade to my lenient and relenting lord. Will there be no reward for all this faithful service? Ay, I should be Lady Lindon! *I will be!* And I think I see the way to securing this visit of the great preacher later on. These men of thought are easiest caught by little things—that child he was with and bestowed so much attention upon, the woman Blake's little girl, a tractable, pliable child enough, whom Lorry rather liked—I will invite her here for a month in the winter; the Cottage is cozy then, and she will love it; and she shall write to Westley Garland, begging him to come and see her, inclosing a pressing invitation from myself; and if this is one of those strong prepossessions I have known men of culture take—although I could never understand why, seeing the number of charming mademoiselles and madames waiting to be booked—he will come, to a certainty. So I do think, my dear Mrs. Vincent, the winter will not be so uneventful after all."

Standing in the garden one morning, standing below the bower-like porch, handing her bird a piece of sugar, the quick ears of the lady detected the musical chime of bells approaching, and the fast trotting of a pair of ponies. "The Howards!" she said, going in-doors and up stairs, "they may call;" and she re-arranged the hair—very long and luxuriant hair it was, worn in a coil—which the rough wind had displaced. Yes, they had driven up to the gate, and peeping round the curtain, she saw the spruce tiger at the ponies' heads, while the Major, with true officer's gallantry, assisted his imposing lady to alight. Now there was a vast difference in the style of these neighborly and eminently genteel ladies. While Mrs. Vincent, come upon her when one might, was the pink of most exquisite neatness and lady-like elegance, Mrs. Major Howard cultivated a far more elaborate *mode*, and was the superessence of extreme grandeur. The robes Mrs. Major Howard adorned were made, she said, by the late costumier-artiste to the Empress Eugénie; the fur jackets, which imparted so astonishing a set-off to the majestic carriage of this military lady, were made, she said, by the private furrier to the Empress of Russia; the magnificent conception in lace and feathers which Mrs. Major Howard entitled her *chapeau* was invariably made, she said, in Paris; she having so frequently to step in and out of her pony-carriage, the vulgar eye of Seaborough and Sleperton was dazzled by highly ornamental buckles upon the shoes, made purposely for her, said the lady, in Austria; altogether, to use Mrs. Major Howard's own words, "The *tout ensemble* is *un peu prodigue.*" The English language, like its fashions, being too meagre for the lady, she affected foreign tongues, of which she spoke as many as the prowlers left at Babel after the dispersion of its architects. In earlier days Mrs. Major Howard had enjoyed life as a governess to a peculiarly restless family, who turned up one morning on the Andes and another on the Cordilleras, a family which, from the head to the tail of it, lived a life of chronic fidgets: it really seeming as though there was not a square yard of habitable soil for them this side of immensity. Now this ceaseless wandering and flitting from place to place served to develop natural ability; and the lady, who, although inoculated with the true principles of an adventuress, was undeniably clever, had slight difficulty in making a brilliant alliance; which, to her disgust, proved any thing but satisfactory, for the Major was over head and ears in debt, and so had remained ever since.

This was the leading lady of Seaborough, who had made a morning call at the Cottage.

To Mrs. Vincent came her maid, the very embodiment of neatness, bearing the lady's card; and Mrs. Vincent went down stairs to where the Major stood on the hearth-rug, as though putting himself upon drill, while his lady was seated widely outspread upon the sofa.

"How do, my dear? We haven't seen you for so long a time; the Major was getting anxious —now you know you were, you naughty man— well, and how do you do?"

"Very well, sit down; won't you take a chair, Major? Pleased to see you out this fine morning!"

"Keep to the regular exercise, my dear madam; to it I attribute the uniformly good health I, as you know, enjoy."

"We thought, perhaps, you would come and dine with us to-day," said the Major's lady; "we shall but sit down to fowls and a shoulder of mutton, but you will pardon a profuse board, knowing we would if we could."

"I shall be very pleased—"

"It is so good of you. Of course you come for the little quiet chat?" Mrs. Vincent bowed.

"Have you heard from Sir Charles Neville lately?"

"Not very," answered the Major's lady, a little confused; "he is hunting in Essex. Sir Charles has friends at Chelmsford, I believe."

"Chelmsford," repeated the Major, standing full front, thumbs tucked in at the armholes of his vest, "wasn't I stationed there in fifty-eight? Ah, no, I recollect—memory's going fast, Mrs. Howard—it was at Colchester; I remember we had a great field-day; wounded in the arm; Cambridge messed with us at the garrison. Was it the garrison or the *Cups?* Politely sent inquiries in the morning;" and the Major took a pinch of snuff from the enameled box presented to him, so he said, by Wellington.

"The Major will never forget the dear duke!" said Mrs. Howard, devoutly; "*Memoria*, my dear, *memoria in æternâ!*"

Mrs. Vincent nodded assentingly, without being in the least aware of its meaning; she was at all times prepared to grapple with the lady's French, her Latin she could not touch.

"Then we may expect you?" said Mrs. Major Howard, rising with august state. "At half past two for three."

"I will be punctual."

"I know you will—the dear Major is so very particular! The force of old habit: *qualis vita, finis ita:* the Major" (whispering to her friend) "is a strict disciplinarian, poor man! Alas, our lot is much changed since we have retired into private life!"

No one had ever quite known what regiment the ex-officer had been major of; his usual reply, upon the question being incidentally raised, was, "Papers at the Horse-Guards, have 'em sent on to you!" and nobody receiving the papers, it was either concluded to have slipped the Major's memory, or that some little difficulty existed about removing the papers from the Horse-Guards. The majority of people had quite a hazy notion respecting that institution, and were rarely surprised the schedule of honor was not forth-coming.

Precise to time, Mrs. Vincent was at the Major's pretty house, just off the Marine Parade, at Seaborough; and there Mrs. Howard received her guest with the large assurance of a lady possessed of the original court presence and true *bon ton.*

The Major, seated upon a footstool, was teaching a remarkably ugly terrier to shoulder a musket in the form of a desk rule.

"Now, Sir!" cried the Major, with the genuine military force, "shoulder—arms! Left wheel! Right about—face! Present! Fire!"

"Major dear, pray don't make so much noise in-doors; take a turn on the lawn; just time for drill before dinner. Poor fellow!" as the Major dutifully called off his troop, "he *will* turn the drawing-room into a parade-ground! And now, dear, *how are* you? I am *so* glad you've run down to see me; for one can't talk before the men; and how proceeds the Hall?"

"The workmen are at it still; they will finish, I suppose, by December."

"And then we shall see this paragon. I told the Major this morning he must prepare to see his poor wife eclipsed entirely. I support a great deal, dear, from the rude staring of these country-folk—and it is very unpleasant being so stared at, isn't it? But after her ladyship arrives I hope they will have something else to attract their attention. I suppose she *is* very stylish, is she not?" and the lady bit viciously at her little finger-nail.

"It is an eccentric style—rather heathenish."

"Oh!" the military lady breathed again. "She does not presume to compete in the lists of fashion?"

"You have nothing to fear on that score. I shall be glad to hear what you think of her."

"Good figure, I dare say, tall, perhaps disposed to *embonpoint?*"

"Of course I can not say, not having seen what changes time and—dissipation have worked. You will not be struck; good carriage, nothing else noticeable."

At this moment the Major was seen to beat a hasty retreat from the field; a man appeared at the garden gate; Mrs. Major Howard arose with dignity and closed the door; the man walked as meaning business, and unpleasant business! Mrs. Major Howard bit her lip, and commenced to play upon the piano, but above all the sound of the music arose the disputing and querulous voice of the Major's creditor. "But I tell you I know he's at home—saw him enter the house. I'm not going till he comes to some definite arrangement about my little bill! I've been for it nigh upon a score of times now, and I don't mean to call no more; if that ain't settled this week, you just tell him it 'll be placed in other hands." The martial tread of the Major resounded along the hall. "What is the matter, Tabitha?" called the Major. "Tell the man we are not requiring any thing to-day!" The man put a foot forward, a knee, a nose; the man stood within the hall. "Ah, Mr. Smelt, you've called for that little matter of—of—you *did* send in the account, I think?" "Every week, Sir, for ten months!" "Bless me, how thoughtful of you! Must have been mislaid. Tabitha, girl, Mr. Smelt's little bill—how is this? Have I not again and again impressed upon you the importance of system in the commissariat? These inaccuracies will occur, my dear Sir, in the most exemplary of magazines" (this said confidentially), "but I am obliged by your calling—very, I will see they are filed, Sir, for the future with regularity. Excuse me—kitchen chimney on fire," and the Major marched for that scene of action to the disregard of the unwelcome intruder.

"Pardon me, my dear; this will, I know, be of service," and Mrs. Vincent pressed her purse upon the embarrassed lady.

"How kind you are!" kissing her. "How can we reward you for these repeated acts of goodness?"

"By not saying any thing about them, dear. Look how good the Major is to Lorry. My boy is my weak point; those that are good to him are good to me, and I am of a grateful nature."

"Dear creature!" murmured the Major's lady, nipping the purse to estimate its contents, then ringing the bell imperiously. Enter Tabitha.

"When any of the tradesmen come to the front-door, Tabitha, tell them I do not permit parleying; they must go round to the kitchen. Let me know the amount of this person's bill."

The martial tread again resounded; the Major had caught the cue.

"Yes, let me know the amount of this person's bill." The Major loftily opened the purse. "State your demand, Sir, without loss of time. And I will thank you, when sending for orders to-morrow, to send the back way; and—do be more careful about sending in those little bills. All dispatches, Tabitha, should be laid upon the breakfast table."

The fish-monger to the Guards having retired satisfied, the Major politely tendered an arm to each lady, and led to dinner.

"My dear, you will take the bottom of the table; Mrs. Vincent, perhaps, will take this upon my right. We are glad to see you with us to-day, ma'am. My dear, attention!"

The Major said grace, the ladies looked down.

"Let me assist you to a little piece of the breast, ma'am."

"If you please. How well your ferns are looking," to the Major's lady.

"Yes, dear; but we are afraid they won't survive the winter; the Major is *so* fond of flowers. Ah, my love, it shows a truly guileless spirit, such fondness for the vegetable kingdom."

"I remember the old duke," said Major Howard, "never appeared in full regimentals without a sprig of rose, shamrock, and thistle in his coat. 'Howard, old boy,' he said to me one day, 'we'll stick to the symbols with the colors.'"

"Dear duke!" said Mrs. Howard, wiping her eyes. "Ah, what the country, the nation, his private friends, lost in him!"

"A little gravy, ma'am. My dear, you have the bread-sauce, assist our friend. So sorry Master Lorry is not here."

There was a violent ringing of the bell, and Tabitha, at the bidding of her master, hastened to learn the meaning of the untimely clamor, returning to say something in a low voice to the Major.

"Dear me, this is most unfortunate! The cover, please; and place my plate in the oven. Really these people have no regard for one's feelings. A fellow about a paltry account for grocery. I declare I was going to put my hand on your purse as though it were my own. Do let me return it, or I am sure to make some absurd blunder—really."

"Pray do, Major. I am so pleased to be of service."

"Well, now, I don't like—it is too imposing. Don't you think so, my dear?"

"The Major is *so* delicate," murmured the Major's wife in her friend's ear, "he can not bear to accept these little favors. I can see he is almost refusing. Shall I coax him?" The other nodded, and the Major was coaxed, and yielded with the grace of a general.

"Help our friend to a little broccoli, my dear."

"You will, *won't* you? Now *do!*" persuaded the Major's lady, sincerely feeling their visitor was entitled to it.

"Thank you, I will. And how are the birds, Major?" Major Howard possessed six canaries, which he had trained to go through drill and a variety of manœuvres.

"In first-class condition, I am obliged; removed them to the back for the sun."

"The dear man is *so* attached to the pretty things," said his lady in a low voice to her friend; "it displays such an innocent taste, and, one may say, in a military man, such tenderness of feeling."

"I suppose the Manor-house will come out quite smart, ma'am, after all the doing up?"

"Yes, Major, it is being elaborately prepared for Lady Lindon—so much the more comfortable for her ladyship!" Mrs. Vincent, with infinite care and neatness, having set a tiny piece of the flower of her broccoli in a soft white bed of the bread-sauce, raised the same upon the plated prong to her mouth, permitting her piercing eyes to dwell an instant upon the liquidly expressive orbs of the Major's lady.

"Those set in high places have much to be thankful for; *we* thought so once, Major, but, alas! were not then sufficiently grateful for all we enjoyed;" and the lady straightened a ruffled piece of lace at her throat.

"Allow me to pass you the drum-stick, my dear."

"Dear Major, he thinks he is carving turkey again."

And Mrs. Major Howard, overcome, but recovering herself, said, "No, Major, attend to our friend."

"Tabitha, a hot plate for Mrs. Vincent; nay, no refusal;" and the Major was making an onslaught upon the second fowl, when he started as though galvanized.

"An ambuscade!" And the ex-officer laid down the carving knife and fork, while a tremendous ringing at the back and knocking at the front caused the ladies to look at one another, and the lady of fashion to sink back gaspingly.

"Oh, Major! I feel as though fainting; these terrible shocks are more than I can bear!"

"My angel!" cried the Major, quite broken down, standing over the stricken but still large form of his lady, while Tabitha entered with a hot plate and the information of two men at the back-door and two at the front.

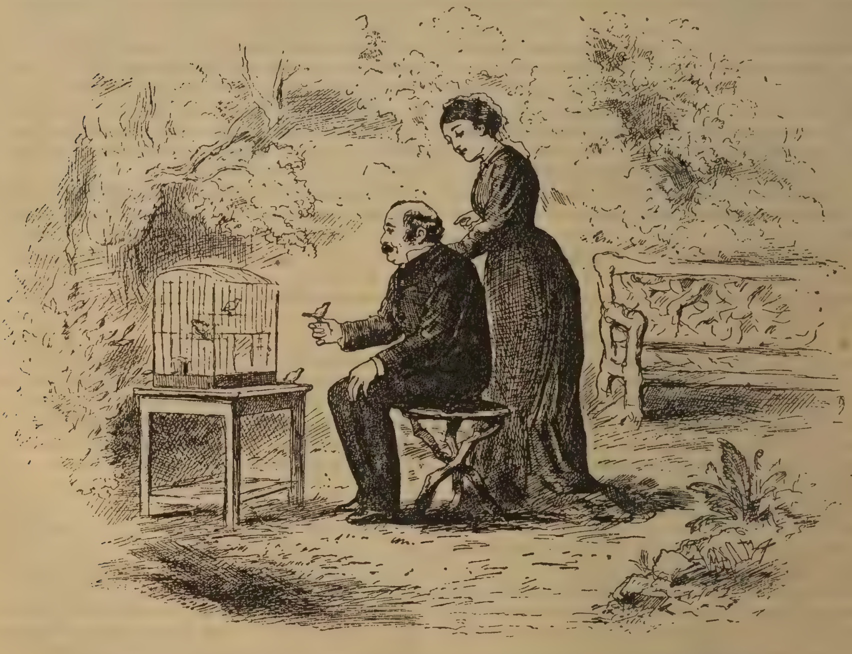
"Butcher, baker, green-grocer, and milkman!" muttered the officer, fanning his wife with the hot plate between the interjections. "What is to be done? I am desperate!"

"Major," said his lady, solemnly, "this is a *coup de grâce.*"

"My dear," said the Major, penitently, "it is a judgment. We were not sufficiently grateful to our friend just now for that generous and sympathetic expression of her esteem."

"Pray see to this, Major. There is yet sufficient in the purse to satisfy these troublesome people. I think you have it."

"I? Why, bless my soul, so I have! Well, now, I don't know what my memory *is* coming to, my dear! No, Mrs. Vincent, I can't, I won't. I'm grateful, ma'am, on the honor of an officer and a gentleman, but I will not thus— Show the persons into the parlor, Tabitha; I will be with them in an instant; this matter must be compromised; there is conspiracy. Although unfortunate, I am not to be hounded to capitulation. Let me prove to the foe that a servant, a subject of the Queen of England"—in his agitation the Major left the room, taking the purse with him.



"THE MAJOR, TAKING ANOTHER FROM THE CAGE, INTRODUCED 'MARSHAL SOULT.'"

"Dear Major!" gasped his lady; "is he not a treasure? is he not brave, confronting single-handed those fearful men?"

"Indeed he is!" responded the visitor, who, like her hostess, marked the removal of the purse in the absent-mindedness of the Major.

That individual returned, and sitting down, with a sigh of relief, said,

"Say grace, my love?"

"Why, Major, we have not dined!"

"Bless my soul, no! Tabitha, the mutton!" in his emotion and forethought preserving an eye to the morrow, when Mr. and Mrs. Harry Abbott were invited to supper.

Thus in due time, when sweets and cheese and dessert and wine had served to complete the agreeable little dinner provided for their friend, it came to a close, as agreeable little dinners will, and the ladies sat down to needle-work and a quiet chat in the drawing-room. The Major, light-hearted again and almost boyish, returned to the lawn, where, sitting upon a chair, he, with his aviary upon another chair opposite to him, put his feathered corps through their exercises, fragments of the commandant's directions floating in now and then to that room where, overcanopied by lace, the ladies reclined by the window at their knitting.

"You have been so good to us to-day! What can I do?"

"Nothing, dear, at present; I will always ask you if there is any thing."

"Do, there's a love! How nice you look to-day! Ah! how I wonder that you do not marry."

"Hush! not a word. Do you not know that my life is consecrated to my books, my pictures, and my music?"

"And to doing good!"

"Well, so far as in my humble capacity—"

"*Present!*" came from the lawn.

"Dear Major, he has the canaries in such discipline!" Mrs. Major Howard's knitting-pins chinked and jinked until they had the ring of specie.

"Well, and what are you going to do all the winter?—remain in Seaborough?"

"I think so; it comes dreadfully expensive travelling, or I should feel thankful to get away. This place is horribly dull in the winter."

"No town has its pleasure all the year round."

"A doubtful point, my love; look at Brighton, to wit."

"Not habitable in summer—a perfect furnace.

By-the-bye, I suppose you've heard this famous Minister is paying rather marked attention to our coming grand lady?"

"Not a word of it. Good gracious, and not divorced! So this is modern ministry, the reprobate!"

"Don't be harsh with him; they are two fascinating ones together. But it *is* hard for poor Lord Lindon!"

"Yes, if I ever pitied any one, I pity his lordship."

"And he stands so little chance beside this captivating fellow."

"Oh, it is dreadful! Ah, my dear, why is our sex so weak?"

"Well, Lady Lindon is not one of the weak sort exactly; but, you see, Garland is such a dangerous character, and so nearly perfect, and so utterly unlike the rest of his sex in every respect, he is quite *irresistible.* I for one am not surprised to hear of it, but I believe he is the only living man who would ever have made an impression upon her ladyship. She is not what she was, although, for that matter, I do not believe she ever cared for that— But this is an old scandal, before your time, my dear."

"Pray tell me all about it; I never did hear the rights of that story, and being *réchauffé* you will not mind; I am quite safe, my dear."

"*Reserve your charge!*" from the garden.

"He is so happy now," said the lady, smiling.

"Ah! I must go and have a look at the Major's birds;" and there was a trail of gray silk upon the lawn, and a little white hand on the Major's shoulder where the elegant widow stood beside him, with her charming—"Just come to see how the dickey-birds are going on!"

"Splendidly. Do sit down." The Major waved a hand to the garden seat near by, and, taking one of the birds from the long cage before him, chirped it upon his forefinger. "This is my conquering hero, Wellington. Head up, Sir; face the lady!" The bird faced at command, and looked so ludicrous the lady smiled. The Major, taking another from the cage, introduced "Marshal Soult." "Soult, attention, Sir; bear the standard!" handing it his silver pencil-case, which the bird clutched by the claw. He then whistled and called "Ney," when a sleek, light-colored bird hopped to the summons, alighting upon the cuff of the Major's sleeve. This was followed by "Niel," by "Pelissier," and by "Saxe," described merely as *maréchals de camp*, the Major explaining with much politeness that the names, with the exception of that of his old friend Wellington, were bestowed out of compliment to Mrs. Howard, whose tastes were so essentially French.

Mrs. Howard came sweeping from the house —"Not to hurry you away, dear, but I know you won't mind telling me if you will stay tea with us; I shall think it *so* kind if you will, but I wanted to know because our maid is going down town; I am sure you will approve my candor, and will tell me if you prefer sally-lunn to muffins. So sorry to put it in this pointed manner."

"I can not stay, dear."

"Oh, but you must!"

"Certainly!" cried the Major.

"There! The Major says you are to, and you dare not disobey the Major!" and the Major's lady pretended to button a cuff, as much as to signify it was time to depart.

"I really can not stay—many thanks; and I have a letter to write to Lorry, who, I think I told you, is in London for a month or so—a little change he was wanting; but the dear boy is there more for study than pleasure. He has a strong inclination for painting. I think if I let him have proper lessons he *will* one day paint."

"You paint, yourself, beautifully!" said Mrs. Howard, with sincerity. It was just praise, Mrs. Vincent being an exquisite artist.

"It would be the greatest joy of my life if Lorry were to turn out some day a great painter. It is the one thing I have ever desired wealth for, that my boy might be so enabled to study under the best masters, and travel to lands where art creates art and cultivates excellence."

"Remember the great duke once saying to me, 'Howard, old boy, I've but one regret, you're not on my shield,' referring to the shield commemorative of his victories, presented to him by the bankers and merchants. Ah! it's a great art, preserving a record by feature, or scene, or incident, of that to live forever—can't think what I was about *not* to be on the shield! But some people are always too late for every thing. Tabitha!" called the Major to their domestic, "tell the boy to put the ponies in."

And Mrs. Vincent was driven home at a fast trot, and with jingle of bells; village urchins coming forth in shoals to stare open-mouthed at the natty little concern, and at the "booful lady o' th' Cottage."

Home to a quieter tea, a thoughtful tea. And after tea to letter-writing.

And once or twice the lady went to the front-door to look at the night, at the belt of dusky trees piercing the starry canopy, at the half circle of lights where the cottages skirted the Green, and at the great house standing back with scaffolding and piles, and a red lantern where a watchman already slept.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

The dead leaves had a rare time of it upon Sleperton Green, when the wind scoured as it did the night Mrs. Vincent stood in her porch watching the lights disappear one by one where the folk retired to their rest. It was a weird, scampering chase, that of the dry and brittle leaves. They frisked impudently around the watchman's legs, and smote his long drab coat, lodged on his old hat, and tickled him on the cheek, and all without waking him; they became ruby under glow of the lantern, and bronze below a light from the open door of the cottage, and ebon where by the great house they huddled close, as though timorous of their quarters.

At last all was dark around Sleperton Green, save for that red light swinging and swaying to the October wind.

Yonder, over the Green, a column or two of smoke, where in Sleperton village the good-wives busied at their husbands' suppers, after long work, or tramping it from market with the master's stock. Still in Sleperton village silence and darkness were prevailing. Beyond this, among the quaint red-bricked houses of Seaborough Old Town, more life was stirring; the blacksmith's forge was but just closing, and the bar parlor of the small tavern was still filled with a roistering crew. Old Seaborough folk timed their rest by Dr. Poppington's school. Exactly at half past nine a bell rang dolorously, and soon a line of feeble glimmer gave form to the old historical barrack, scaring the owls from their ivied fastnesses, and within ten minutes all was dreary and still. Then the good-man would say, "It's bed-time, old woman; the school bell's gone this long while," and would draw quicker whiffs at the pipe: and every night by ten the Old Town slept.

So it came about, as she knew very well, this widow lady at the Cottage was the sole wakeful creature. Her books, her work, kept her up until a late hour; but then, save for some stray gypsy or prowling poacher, there were none to see. Upon this night the lady softly closed her front-door and secured it; then as softly—for the very neat maid was asleep—went to her kitchen, and placed a light in the lantern she was accustomed to use when going to the Manor-house at this hour. She shrouded it with the thick shawl wrapped about herself, and quitted the cottage by the back way, taking a leaf-strewn, bramble-grown path leading to the rear of the mansion.

Full soon would her run of the noble dwelling be at an end, and but the galling satisfaction remain of seeing a troop of others go in and out. Not for an instant did she suppose Lady Lindon would resume that friendly intercourse previously existing between them, nor did she wish it.

How strange the place looked with great patches of white upon the floor; workmen's baskets, timber, braziers, glue, and paint; with scaffolding, carpenters' benches, and the joiners' implements; cans, bottles, and earthen pipkins of the stainers; with here a fire stove waiting to be fixed, and there a cornice in process of regilding; an array of plates for the doors, and varnish for the grainers to make the panels lustrous. Here were boards taken up, there the wainscoting was taken down, for rats were many in the Manor-house, and it was not to be expected her ladyship would submit to any annoyance of that sort. In one place the dividing wall between two rooms of moderate dimensions was removed—her ladyship's ideas of interior space were for any thing but contracted areas; in another a ceiling had been raised to present more loftiness: all was confusion, as is inevitable under such circumstances, to be righted only when the united forces of Sleperton and Seaborough char-women applied themselves vigorously to the task.

Some of the rooms were not to be touched, such as the large dining-room, the library, the double drawing-room, and the study, and those rooms were locked. The bunch of duplicate keys possessed by the lady admitted her to any of them, and she entered the room where that painting stood, like the haughty Helen herself. As she did so, she uttered a little cry of surprise: a man was standing before it, holding on high a light, the better to observe the picture. He extinguished the light in an instant, but not before she had recognized the features. There was a dead stillness for one moment; then, without raising her lantern, she said, with admirable calmness, thereby wishing to restore his presence of mind,

"I—have—seen—you, Lord Harold. Do not fear; you can go and return as many times as it pleases you, and no word shall escape my lips to any save yourself. I knew you would come back—have expected you. Let me be your friend, as of old, if only in gratitude for your long kindness to us. Here is my hand—will you not take it?—the hand of Anna Vincent."

There was such perfect silence she became alarmed, and restlessly placed the lantern on the mantel-piece; its light fell across the dark oak paneling, upon the dense pile of the table-cover, and skins stretched upon the floor; but not upon the man returned to the scene of his grief, where he leaned back against the wall, scathed by the face limned with such cruel perfection—the face he had loved, had wooed to love, had died to the world for. He could not utter a word, though to thank her only, and the woman waited; he would be weak following upon this, all shaken; he would speak and he would listen all in good time. She was patient also, not speaking. She was conscious of muffled, strangled throes, that had not sound, but shook the space, bearing grim witness to the suffering; and she waited. Oh, he would be weaker after this, and need such soothing! She even turned the lantern round to give him more shade; he should have shade in plenty. Only wait till she was Lady Lindon, and see the myriad lights, though!

He came forward, taking her hand, saying, in broken utterance, "Thanks, friend; you were ever considerate."

She placed her other hand upon his, and pressed it ever so lightly, yet sufficient to express all her heart-felt sympathy; and she stood more in the light, that he might see how her face could interpret the feeling at her heart. A still attractive face, unlined, and with a bloom clear as at sixteen; her hair, as usual, in perfect order. Had Mrs. Vincent encountered a goblin, her hair would have remained in perfect order.

"Rumor of this reached me; I only come to satisfy myself."

"And are you pleased, my lord?"

"I do not occupy the house; Lady Lindon may as well be here as not."

"It has struck you there may be some little sorrow at the bottom of this strange proceeding; is it not so? Perchance repentance."

And she knew that he quivered like the aspen, but he did not answer her.

"I confess," she continued, "it bears that aspect upon the face of it; but I can not reconcile the thought that her ladyship is now a foremost—nay, *the* foremost—leader in society."

"Her ladyship always took a foremost position in society," replied Lord Lindon, proudly. "It is nothing new."

"But it is, I think, new for her ladyship to hold her own as absolute monarch in the gay world; and this she is now doing in Brighton, where so complete is her sway, our literary Bayard, I am told, is all beside himself."

"What riddle is this? Whom do you style your literary Bayard?"

"What! *do* you not know?—Garland, preacher and poet, Utopian philanthropist, and chevalier of distressed humanity."

"I am sadly behind the times—have not heard the name before; but if he is that, the sooner he comes to Sleperton Manor, the better." And with a half moan the nobleman, wearily taking the light, said, "Let us go from this room. I have not seen the library; stands it where it did?"

"Untouched, save for the liberal use we have made of your permission to read the books."

He bowed with gracious pleasure, glad they had done so; and the two proceeded to the library.

Upon the table, central of the spacious chamber, were several works of recent date. He had not seen them, and looked at their backs curiously; men were represented there whom he had known, felt the cordial grasp of hand from some, possessed letters written by others; it was like coming back to life, this weird remeeting with old worth.

The lady, taking up one of the books—a quietly yet richly bound copy—handed it to his lordship, with the simple remark, "Our Bayard's last, *The Triumph of Seasons;* it is causing some stir just now."

"Thanks; I will read it." And the owner of the large library of old and valuable books lining the lofty walls walked slowly round, noting each change of position even after all that lapse of years. It is the one sad sensation the book-lover alone can know—abruptly parting with a rare and well-loved collection, and abruptly standing in their presence again after the interval which seems so interminable. It was with fond attention his lordship scanned each line and tier.

"I am glad to see the old friends again; truly did Johnson say, 'Books are faithful repositories, which may be a while neglected or forgotten, but, when they are opened again, will again impart their instruction.'"

"It is a privilege we shall miss very much. When her ladyship arrives we shall be forced to turn again to our own modest collection."

"I will send you a parcel at intervals. I have some choice books of travel that will please your son."

"And *won't* you tell me where you are hiding yourself? Remember, not a soul shall know."

"Some day, perhaps;" kindly, gently, yet firmly said.

"Tell me now; why keep this a secret from *me?* If you but knew a tithe of what I have gone through in my solicitude, you would not hesitate like this."

"But why should I? I, dead to the world, and happily contented thus;" his thoughts wandering to his darling, the one comfort of many years, reared with such care, and guarded so jealously.

"Would you not care to learn how things are going—how my lady is received, how she looks and acts, and if I see the shadow of a change, or least bias in your favor?"

"I should."

"Then let me write to you. I will furnish most faithful records of all you would care to know."

"I have a friend—an old country clergyman in the north: write me under cover to him."

She turned her head away as though aggrieved. "And am I so little worthy of your confidence? Time was when you thought differently. Ah me! Absence makes esteem grow colder."

"Not so, my friend; and if I do not tell you, 'tis from no distrust; but I have resolved to live apart from all and every old association."

"Alone?" The keen eyes were upon him this time; and she noticed that he flushed and did not immediately reply.

"I understand," she murmured, in a low and interested voice, "you are *not* alone."

"No. I am not alone."

"And *I admire* you for it, the wounded heart needed this; it is well. Is—is she *very* pretty? But *I know* she is, with your fastidious sense of beauty."

"Very beautiful; and as charming as she is beautiful."

"Oh! but you must tell me more now—tell me, that I too may love her."

"Little to tell, save that she has grown up beneath my care, so you may rest satisfied I shall never again suffer as I have suffered once; if you but knew, my friend, the intensity of my love for—"

"Yes?" Rapt, and with eagerness.

"What matter names? See, here is her portrait; I brought it to bear me company on my journey."

The lady looked long, with a hard, critical look; the criticism came.

"Young! A good face, attractive, I should think, in the life; these firmer lines at the mouth denote—"

"Yes?" In his anxiety he stood up, and over her as she held the picture.

"*Faithlessness!*" And she laid it down as though it burned her fingers, while he, clutching convulsively at her chair, gasped,

"Whatever makes you think that?"

"Well, women, you know, can tell so quickly." And she looked up coyly yet archly in his face, as though compromising herself by admitting so much. "Was I not the first to open your eyes to—to—you know?"

He nodded, with an expression of anguish.

"You must be careful."

"I have been careful; if you knew all, you would say so."

"Then tell me all; I may help you. I *can* sympathize with you; heart and soul I am one with all your plans."

He smiled sadly.

"In spite of my life's sorrow, I am fortunate in finding sympathy with your sex. I have a most thoughtful person in my house who acts as her companion, and is truly mindful of my comfort; a gentlewoman like yourself, she has the same delicacy and forethought."

"I am very interested; tell me her name, that even I may think gratefully of one so mindful of yourself."

Holding the portrait to the light again, and narrowly examining certain traits, discoverable only to those of her ability perhaps, she added, "And your friend, this Mrs.—"

"Brandon."

"Is companion to Miss—"

"Lena St. Aubyn."

"Yes, and very nice; you must let me have this portrait to copy—no, don't refuse me, please—that I may look on it sometimes; love it for your sake."

The request was put in so tremulously tender a tone, and with such a world of womanly friendship underlying it, he consented to this also.

"And now tell me where I may send it to you. What, still hesitating? But you are not afraid that I shall steal your treasure?" (banteringly).

"No." And he told her. Then she thanked him, and wrote it upon a piece of paper, together with the names *Lena St. Aubyn* and *Mrs. Brandon.* Then carefully, with characteristic neatness, she folded the picture up in a sheet of clean white paper, and placed it in her bosom.

"And now it is a mutual understanding between us; I am to write you all transpiring here, and you are to write me all your little hopes and fears."

"Agreed, my friend; 'twill serve to pass the winter pleasantly."

"Ay," she said, in a hoarse voice, "pleasantly."

"You have a cold."

"What else can I expect, with half the walls down? But I must be going; so sorry I can not ask you to the Cottage, which would be more comfortable—"

"Thanks; this will do; I would rather pass the night in my home—my fathers' home. Good-night; may you be recompensed for all!"

"I hope so," said the lady to herself, devoutly, while she wrapped the shawl about her, and quickly passed over the ground home.

First, the veriest mixing of brandy and water, where, in a precise little glass, the spirit and the sugar and the water were arranged with the utmost neatness; next, to add a postscript to Lorry's letter, of which the unusual feature was presented of a postscript thrice the length of the letter, the closing lines being:

"I will send the portrait to-morrow, and you must study it carefully. You know your course; follow it: first find the girl out, next win her love; and I think it will not be half distasteful to you. Leave all the rest to me. Good-night. May all guardian angels watch over and prosper you, and preserve you virtuous and good! Your loving and devoted mother, A. V."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DEALER IN FOREIGN BIRDS.

October: Brighton very full: one of the most crowded seasons for years; the King's Road in the afternoon a busy scene of comfortable wealth: pathways thronged, and the drive a block of carriages. It was rather chilly on the piers; besides, nobody walked on the piers in the afternoon, keeping to the paved boulevard alongside the shops. Upon a sunny afternoon more ancient families, more aristocratic men and well-dressed women, were here to be seen than any where else in her Majesty's dominions. A continuous stream of carriages, some of new and somewhat rakish build, some that had belonged to the fathers and had come down with the rest of the property, some of quiet, unobtrusive elegance, and many paneled with the noblest heraldic ensigns of England; horses, sleek, glossy, the handsomest to be found upon a road; dogs on the easy trot behind, or seated impudently in the vehicles—little dogs and big dogs, and dogs that were no dogs at all, being merely balls of fluffy whiteness. What a panorama of life—of life in high places! And to be sure there was a glimpse here and there of quite a different stratum—just a hint of some other order, of which these knew little: the girl with the basket of roses, the man with the penny hat guards, the respected firm with the Punch and Judy, the old dame with the lace, the merchant in brandy-balls, the blind man, the fancier with toy puppies, and a man driving a truck along—a small platform truck with a ledge, and upon it a wall of diminutive cages, wherein fluttered and piped, as not liking the noise, a quantity of feathered captives. The man wheeling this concern before him was not of prepossessing visage; he had the outward and visible sign of the P.R., and a cast and bust popularly described as of the bull design. His caravan bore upon its seasoned side this inscript:

JOHN BEECH,
DEALER IN FOREIGN BIRDS,
106 VINEGAR STREET,
HACKNEY ROAD,
LONDON.

Times had been bad with Mr. Beech. One day on London Bridge he met another gentleman—a gentleman in the penny-whip line. There was fraternal feeling between these two, and they celebrated the meeting at the nearest public-house; there Mr. Beech disclosed that he was "down on his luck, and didn't know what to make out o' the cussed City!" Whereupon the other gentleman, who also was destitute of prepossessing attractions, said, ferociously, "I never knowed no good come of it yet; it's too chuck full o' they furreners!"

"Himported two an' a 'alf dozen from Lea Bridge this werry week, most on Sunday!" And having thus reproachfully vindicated the foreign interests, Mr. Beech buried the echo in the recesses of a pewter pot.

"It's the warments from the Continent as is taking money out o' the pockets o' the 'onest! But I 'ad the crackest time as ever I 'ad in my purfession down at Brighton yonder; that's whur the folks spend the money, an' no mistake!" And the Foreign Dealer caught at it, and thought to do a thriving business, once get to Brighton; so to Brighton he came, leaving the establishment in Vinegar Street, with its sundry accumulation of horrors, in the experienced hands of Mr. John Beech, junior: an emphatic repetition of the dealer, with the heightening conferred by a protracted penal graduation. It may be mentioned there was also contingent upon the establishment in Vinegar Street a Mrs. John Beech, senior, and a Mrs. John Beech, junior, likewise not characterized by either the graces which adorn or the beauties which embellish the poetical form of woman. The elder Mrs. John Beech had been married to her present lawful husband exactly thirty years, and every day of every year of the thirty the grace before meat had been a most furious quarrel. Mr. and Mrs. John Beech, junior, settled their little differences at the same time in another part of the room; thus the abode in no sense partook of the character of a Quaker settlement. Mrs. John Beech, senior, had cause for discontent, even for expression of that discontent, since her husband, her son, and her son's wife were ever arrayed in battle against her; the poor soul had a sorry time of it; her hair was gray, her face was wrinkled, and the years were going, and never a kind word out of any of them; but she still fought with the best—all her sex of Vinegar Street were afraid of her—would fight to the end. Bird seed, and she had little else, developed the muscle, and this cadaverous female fought like a trooper. Her daughter-in-law spent most of her time in the street. She had as distinctively *al fresco* a taste as any ruddy-faced daughter of Epsom—a vagrant, roving, conversational, thirsty, and warlike taste it was. The Beeches, perhaps, were neither better nor worse than their neighbors, but they certainly made their existence more palpable, at least to the sense of hearing. It is not a gratifying picture, and our lines have fallen upon any thing but pleasant places; yet such was the abode of ornithology this dealer had temporarily departed from. And he had been doing uncommonly well in the wealthy southern town, making money fast, so many bringing little ones here with whom to wish was to have.

And there was a particular little one whose name was Rose, with whom especially to wish was to have, in so far as a tall and stately friend was concerned. Thus when Rose wished for canaries as companions for her love-birds, no promise was made, as was usual with him, but mental note was taken, and the wish would be borne in mind until realized. Therefore when Mr. Garland (who would rather deal with such than at the rented and taxed fine shops, where they knew him by sight, and would go upon some excuse to their inner rooms and bring the rude to stare between tiers of cages) met the Dealer in Foreign Birds, he hailed him, desiring he would call at his house in the evening, which the dealer, touching his rabbit-skin cap, thankfully promised, and was there to time with his varied collection. The gentleman saw the man in the servants' hall, where the cages were ranged upon a sideboard.

"You guarantee these are from the Canaries, my friend?"

"On my solemn hoath an' davy, yer worship!" The dealer conferred this title from awesome recollections of a magistrate before whom he was once cajoled by overpersuasive officers, and who wore a white neckcloth.

The Minister took one of the birds from its cage with exquisite tenderness. Upon the mantel-piece was a saucer containing some liquid and a brush; he passed this lightly over the wing, and so quickly and carefully as not even to alarm the little captive, which, so far from fluttering with extremity of fear at the unwonted procedure, rested calmly peaceful: it is all in the touch, as Beethoven said. The dealer watched the operation with fuming dismay, and shuffled about, looking uneasily toward the door, and thinking this grave, methodical exposer of his rascality more like the magistrate than ever. Mr. Garland returned him the bird with one wing brown and the other wing yellow; still he did not look stern and severe, did not flash fine and imprisonment out of one eye, and ruin with starvation out of the other. To the man's amazement the Minister's eyes looked kindly, although sadly, upon him, while a softened light, scarcely a smile, yet very pleasant upon the handsome face, changed the whole aspect: and the man, instead of feeling browbeaten and discomfited, not to say frightened, was at ease, although overcome by astonishment. The Minister, with hands behind him, looking carelessly at the line of cages, then asked the man, kindly beyond description,

"Did you ever try to get an honest living?"

"Times out o' number, yer honor; an' the fust I went to jist looked at me an' says, 'Take on a 'ang-dog feller like you! why, it's on yer face that ye're born to be 'anged!' I says, 'Thank ye!' and was 'spectful, though I'd like to 'a 'ad him out on Plaistow Marshes some Sunday mornen; and the next I went to for work called th' overseer, and bade him 'turn the jail-bird out o' the yard, only cos my 'air was cropped so short, yer honor, which I allow come of being convicted, and I an' a pal serving fourteen year; but as the good chaplain said, only the day afore we left, 'There's many a year afore ye yet, and, I 'ope, a 'onest life,' and it's hard I've tried to gain sich!" He was passing his arm briskly over the rabbit-skin cap as though refurbishing the constitution.

"I believe this land to be a difficult one in which to regain the honest standing, once lost."

"An' when you never 'ad none, as I never 'ad, it's doublesome dif'cult. But I'm sorry, an' certain, to 'a put some o' the natives in the lot I brought yer honor to chuse from; it's 'ere is the African, and gems they be!"

Therewith he brought forward three birds satisfying the representation in every way, and these the Minister purchased, also the entire stock of colored ones, with the remark, "I suppose in the case of a shower of rain the birds will return to their old form?" The man nodded. He could afford to act truthfully with this munificent patron.

"Now," said the Minister, purchase and payment effected, "I have no possible interest in advising you upon any thing; but as a man with feeling I do offer you this friendly caution, and it bears its own encouragement along with it—try again what honesty, and with honesty truth, will do for you; and if you meet with similar rebuff, try again, and go on trying till the last penny is spent; then —well, come to me, and you shall have a pound or two toward helping you still to try on. There, never mind the thanks, my friend, to me: thank Him who enables me sometimes to be of some such use as this."

With a courteous bow the Minister left the hall, the dealer standing dumfounded with the first kind words that had ever encouraged him to better deeds, always excepting those of the chaplain at the penal settlement, whose words, uttered to all alike, if pointing the way, yet lacked the grand humanity witnessed here. And one of the maids held the door for the dealer to pass out, not with servant's impudence, but with kindly civility. It was with a peculiarly softened expression the man looked back at the Minister's house. So far as we know, it might have been with veneration, with gratitude.

"I'll be kinder to the wife arter this," he muttered, jogging on with the empty truck.

Meantime the Minister had opened the doors of the cages and set the feathered colony at liberty, all but the canaries, which he knew would fall upon ill fortune in the colder land. While opening the door of the last of the cages, after the others had flown, the inmate, startled maybe at its sudden liberty, fluttered to his vest and nestled there. "Oh, that I had wings as a bird!" he said, while tenderly removing it, and opening his hand to the serene depth of blue, where the evening star—the star of hope—shone its luminous invitation, "for then would I flee away, and be at rest."

Next time Rose came, the gift awaited her, and highly delighted the child appeared. "They shall be taken to our house, where they will have more sun and air." She alluded to Mr. Blake's country house out Bramber way, some ten miles off, the well-to-do chemist, like many another worthy councilor, possessing his comfortable country residence. It was here those ponies were which Mrs. Blake had so longed to improve her state withal; it was here Rose caught the bloom of the flower of her name, and passed all her happiest hometime. A modern dwelling, yet overspread with the cheery ivy, and with valuable garden ground encircling; a dwelling bespeaking affluence, where, as the lady observed, "a duchess might be content to live;" and looking well from the road, a great point with Mrs. Blake, to whom such perspective was second only to comfort; and reading imposing in reports, with JOSEPH BLAKE, ESQ., IVY HOUSE, as the donor of a church subscription, or chairman of the District Board: which reports Mrs. Blake used to keep folded up in the linen press, with lavender, to impart a country odor, and musk to keep off the moth. Imposing also on the green gate posts, where to the fore the legend ran,

IVY HOUSE.
VISITORS.

And to the rear,

IVY HOUSE.
SERVANTS.

Thus "our house" was an institution in the Blake family, and was said to be supported in style. Quite recently a page-boy had been added, and little Rose, with the true child's appetite for novelties, was full of the page that afternoon of calling to see her birds; and it was this for him to do, and that for him to do, and he was so good he would do any thing for her, and the rest. To all of which the preacher listened with the gentle attention always displayed when the child was talking, but with a sadder shade than ordinary passing subtly athwart the brow.

The reigning favorite was conspicuous by his absence on the King's Road. Come upon him unexpectedly where one would, it was never there. Once a lady said to him, "We never see you on the road!" He replied, "My study and parish really occupy too much of my time." It was no wonder; the world was his study, the world his parish; and so long as a broken heart was needing solace, an impoverished family needing help, an imprudent youth or maiden needing guidance, a sick person needing medicine and nourishment, and talking to and reading to and cheering up, so long his absence would be conspicuous from that or any pleasure-track. He dared not be idle, first, from principle; next, from fear; for to be idle was to brood—ever a dangerous expedient with so finely strung a soul, and with one so disposed to look back mournfully upon a procession of past sorrows.

One of the distinguished patronesses of the road had, however, returned to it—Lady Guilmere; and the sight of the lady gladdened many choice friends who had not thought to see her there again. Her ladyship was one of the most charming representatives of high life to be met with in the drawing-rooms. Not beautiful: little in that face save its nobility and genuineness: yet how excellent a union! Not young: her ladyship was advanced in life, yet wore her years with such placid and happy quietness, they seemed half afraid to touch this gracious gentlewoman. Not dressy: her ladyship dressed others, and was content herself with unassuming gear. By no one who heard the marvelous eloquence, by no one who read the impassioned writings, was the Minister more truly esteemed and beloved than by this refined gentlewoman, whose one word of heart-felt commendation outweighed a crowded room's applause.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I CLING TILL I DIE."

CLOSE upon the solitude of the far-reaching downs stood an old black cottage, and a garden where herbs and grasses flourished, and a few vegetables. It was all very poor and comfortless, and the last place where one would expect to find books and other evidences of scholarship; yet on a rude table there was a roll of writing, and against the bare walls some deal shelves, whereon stood ancient volumes, mostly upon botany. A mere earthen floor, holes in the roof, and a rent in the door; yet writing materials and sundry worn appliances of studious hours.

An old man's coat was hanging beside the patched jacket of a boy. The writing on the roll was difficult to decipher; parts where the writer's hand had been very tremulous; parts where the ink was blurred by tear-stains.

And the writing ran: "Why is it Age is bitter? If by chance I walk through the streets of the town, after one of my long rambles, or to sell the herbs at the chemist's, the young people are rude to me, thinking, perhaps, I do not notice it or do not feel it; they jeer at the figure I cut, call me scarecrow, and grimace at these wrinkles. I see all, but take no notice; the Lord bears witness. Outside, the boys are ready with their shouting, 'Old Rag-picker!' I am no rag-picker. 'Old Jew!' I am no Jew. Poor, through love of my science, which has been more to me than wealth; very poor. And old: yet I see not why Age should be so bitter. Poor and old, that's it. A mended coat; and, as I live, another hole to-day; split again, well as I darned away at that rent while Arthur slept.

"I don't so much mind what they say when I am alone, but it tortures me if he hears: lest it warp the love.

"The rough lads throw stones at our poor cottage, but Arthur and I do not care, we are *together*. Great storms of stones might come, and, so they did not divide us, well: the boy's love makes the old man strong, patient, courageous.

"They say I starve him and myself too on the green food; after all, what matters their idle talk? We know. Very happy, we need not care; yet one broods upon it. Some such wicked word may one day make the lad change. I hang so on his happiness with me, it keeps life in my old heart; to see him gambol on the downs to-day almost made me young again; so tender! 'Lean on me, grandfather! How you are shaking!' And the arms will twine about me, gentle as a girl's.

"It seems rather hard to us now and then, that big town being so full of wealth and we so poor, and my loving lad is well-nigh jacketless. Well, we will mend and mend the old one: old, but precious, every shred of it, from being so long worn by him.

"I have given up clinging to my Book; it lies there on the shelf, getting yellow and seared as the wood-side leaves between its pages; yet the hours and days and years I have spent upon it, leaned on it, cherished hope of it! Unknown, a quarter of a life under the faded sheets, and all the fruit of all my labor. One day when I am gone it may be known, taken in hand by those who will esteem it for what it teaches; and it will benefit Arthur, so I will not repine. Yet, for all that, it's sad to see it there, loving it next the boy; and it brings back remembrance of his mother, dear as my very soul. I cry over it still, but cling to it no longer.

"To-day, crossing a square in the town, nurse-girls drew their little charges away with, 'Old Bogie, dears, eats little children!' and ran by mockingly. I would not let any see the depth of my wound, for I love the children all. I toiled home painfully, and found Arthur hoeing at the bit of ground, and I never kissed him as warmly. Despised, I am comforted; his love soothes, his tenderness heals. God bless his sunburned beauty, and clustering curls graceful as the ferns of autumn!

"It was a poor place to bring the child to, when their home was broken up, and my daughter departed for Australia, but he did not seem to mind, and has learned to love it and his old grandfather wonderfully. I somehow never thought she would come back when I took the lad. She was always a restless one, was Mary; and now I hope she won't, if it's to take the lad away; it would be death to part with him after all these years. Mercy! how the wind blows! Another piece of the roof off!

"When the wind blows shrill, and pierces the chinks and crannies I am forever trying to repair, we just gather close for warmth, glad of our shelter, begrudging nobody a better. If rain comes in, we shift our seats, and place a bowl to catch it, feeling grateful to the Lord for softer water which makes mellower tea of our herbs. We make the best of every thing: we are *together!*

"What if we are ridiculous figures? It is something to live to cause laughter; and doubtless many a dainty dame does not laugh any too much; so we do good in our humble way, and are happy to be of service.

"People think me dry and withered as yonder bunches hanging from the roof; that does not matter; there are those about, poor old souls, whom doctors never visit, that bless our coming, and think me any thing but dead to feeling. No; perhaps it would be better if I could feel a little less; Age is all too feeling, and this is why Age is bitter.

"The other day a good man looked in; he asked my name and where I went to church. 'Nowhere,' I said; then he was good enough to appear shocked; to tell me I was chief of sinners, and to pronounce me damned. I thought it harsh, but took no heed, for I was trimming our lavender, and the sweetness of its breath seemed to set all right. I bowed respectfully, and removed the old cap as in presence of the priest; but yon great hill is our church, and I want no other music to take me near to heaven than the music of my young boy's voice. The rest I leave to Him who made that priest as well as me.

"Sometimes, watching Arthur in his sleep, tired, I doze, and dream that I am rich, and can clothe him well and buy him books; and sometimes that I am poor, and he is discontented, and would be away, and has longing for other faces: and I start as men awake from sleep of the white poppy, faint as one coming forth from fever: and I kneel by the old straw mattress with such dread yearning one would think it had been reality.

"Young plants *will* trail from the stem. I have been more moved than usual by a slender circumstance that yet weighs upon my spirits. I sometimes send the boy down to the shop where my herbs are taken; he has but to leave them and receive the payment. A few days since, some one at the shop spoke rudely to him, with a coarse comment upon his length of hair: the little daughter of the house, in hiding by the desk, overheard, and coming forth, beaming with smiles and most kind consolation, gave him more than the worth of the herbs, and made all worth seem valueless in his young foolish eyes—my poor, poor child! Taken by the soft light in her eyes, he came home to me for the first time thoughtful. I felt chilled. It was wrong of me, perhaps; but, oh, my love for my darling passes estimation by common laws! I was digging mould about the marjoram beds. 'Come and help me, Arthur,' said I, gently, and he obeyed with the old sweet obedience, but this time without looking up in my face with that light I love so well: the pleasant smile that, seen below the sunset flush, always makes me think of those upon the golden shore; he did not speak, went to work indifferently, and presently left the spade, and went and sat down in the cottage. I watched it all from under the brim of my old straw hat. I felt dreadful pain, and went on digging as though digging my grave. When twilight came I taxed him kindly—'What is it, Arthur dear; don't mind telling me, do ye?' Pressing it half carelessly, half earnestly, but with a silent prayer that it might be nothing, it came out with his own innocent candor, but with a deepened color, that even in the twilight glowed upon me with its fatal beauty. I would not let him know the pain or see the tears; and, twining our creeper by the door, entered into his boyish feeling with my old heart wrung afresh at each new charm, described so rapidly when he found me a gentle confidant. I reasoned with him, yet most lovingly and firmly, as the strength was given me. It caused me more emotion, knowing the thing to be natural, but I said, 'Love the plants a little longer, Arthur; they are God's young, and will never fail you, as the young of men are like to do; never build your happiness on such; avoid the town, my dear; the further from it and the higher upon these hills, the nearer to heaven!' He went to bed early, with heightened color, and, all the long hours I sat by him watching, was restless. Next day he went on the downs to get me some roots from among the furze plants where the wild violets grow. It seemed to me he was longer gone than of yore, and I could not work. I kept looking up the hill, straining my eyes to catch the distant glimpse of his coming back with basket and book as usual. Presently he came, running joyously, and bounded in with the news that he had seen her; she had been there at play with other companions, and had wished him a sweet good-morning! It was nothing; I laughed it off; but sitting that evening reading while he slept, I heard him whisper her name, and it chilled me more than all the gusts of wind that ever howled about the cottage. I have no Bible. I use an old Milton I bought for fourpence in the market, in its place. I went to it for comfort, but only found the old sadness over again, of cherished ones turning ingrates, and wounding those that had lived but in their truth. I have not moved much in the world of men, but I know the ending to be ever the same. I would not have my courtly lad befooled by the silk-frocked Miss of a wealthy trader, who would toss him to the winds scouring the downland without so much as a farewell. But my darling and I must suffer, because forsooth his fancy has fallen upon this pretty child of the town. Her father is a man of station among his fellows, and would be much put out to know his daughter had spoken with a ragamuffin. Yet it was only to-day, the very man, walking up here, came and asked me about the pains in my back, kindly promising to send me an embrocation. (It would have made me upright had he said his child was gone to France, to school.) My boy came running out, and doffed his cap to this great man. 'A pretty lad, my friend! I'm wanting a page at my country house, which, you know, lies some ten good miles out. Let him come, and I will treat him well; what say you, boy, could you wait at table? Would you like the life? A little polishing, old friend, to erase effects of early training, and the boy might suit us very well: and be a good thing for himself; it's a thousand pities he should be brought up like this! You won't stand in the way of your boy's advancement, I hope?' 'This is rather sudden, Sir,' I murmured, clearly as my trembling would permit; my head was bowed, for I was crushed. He did not notice it, would have scouted the idea; I continued my digging, vigorously, feeling thankful I was upon it when he called; dug my agony down, and shoveled mould thereon, and planted rue, while awaiting to hear what my boy would say, for I had left it with him.

"'I will not stand in the way of my boy's advancement, Sir; let him decide between us.'

"And I would not look up, even if I had the strength, lest my darling should be influenced; but that moment I could not dig, these hands were powerless to raise the spade. How I trembled to catch the tone of his voice; how long it was in breaking upon me! I think it was a struggle with him; then I heard this, hesitating and falteringly,

"'I should like it, Sir, so my grandfather's willing.'

"I wanted something from the cottage, and went in-doors. How different it looked! I heard him say, 'Well, I'll send you some clothes, with your grandfather's embrocation, to-morrow morning,' and he called 'Good-day' to me, but I could not answer; and then he strode off with heavy gold at play upon his spotless vest, and such an air as to say, 'Another of Creation's blunders about righted, I think!' while I sat stupefied on this old stool, leaning elbows on table, face buried in my hands; until I felt *his* arms about me; and then I thrilled, but only to become icy cold all over.

"It all happened so quickly; just that walking up my little path, those few words, and all the old happy time was ages behind. I shrank from his caress of half remorse, lest yielding to it I should give way utterly—"

A break in the writing, a half-finished page, even the mark where the pen had fallen from the writer's hand upon the paper.

Strange loneliness in the place. The wind stirring the little jacket and rustling it against the old coat, as though it would creep therein and nestle. Bunches of dried herbs swaying disconsolately, as though searching for an accustomed hand. A spade, a stool, a tattered "Milton," with some wild flowers between the pages, and a trail of ivy.

The remainder of the writing:

"When, years ago, the first blow of my daughter's loss fell upon me, and left a loneliness so bitter it seemed no other would ever fill the void, I turned instinctively to my science; for the lone country walks seemed more in harmony with my darkened solitude of soul. Mary had seldom accompanied me in the old days, and there was nothing to recall her; but the boy has always been my companion; we have rambled over the hills and through lanes and woods until every bush and plant is a symbol of his presence. How can I ever go one of those walks again? His young bright eyes have sought my choicest treasures—those hanging on the wall with yellow tickets are all of his finding. I have never sold those; they are very dry, almost shrivel at the touch, and the writing on their labels has faded away; but much as I need money, I will not sell those, for theirs is a language deeper than botany. And I am an old man since I hung them there; they called me old then: 'Old weed-picker,' boys of the township shouted. It was not true, but no matter now. *He* made the youth, and kept the life in my heart, and now—

"Mercy! how the wind flickers this poor light! And my fingers are numb with cold. I used to notice neither. It is horrible now I am all alone. I might die; not a soul to hear my prayer that he should be kept in ignorance; not a hand to place his little coat beside me on the bed. I have put it by the fire with his shoes, as I used to do when he ran in wet; I talk to them, saying, 'Arthur will soon come; Arthur will soon come!' Oh, my heart so yearns over them, God help me! Yet these holes in the dear old boots. And I couldn't mend them, try I never so deftly. It was better, Arthur; thou wast in the right, my love!

"No little hand to be laid again upon my shoulder, while the pretty face makes the cottage brighter than a palace. I cover his bed while I sit writing here; my eyes *will* wander to where they used to rest upon the straggling curls, and cheeks flushed by dreams; and now the cold bare wall, the dim, drear couch! No boyish play of swift young feet pattering upon the floor will awaken me to-morrow. I can scarcely think him gone; the very flowers he gathered last are hardly withered. I try not to see his jacket hanging upon the peg when I come in, tired, and worried by the lads shouting, 'Where's yer boy, master? Starved yer boy? Sold yer boy? Where's curly-head, master?' Now, indeed, I dread to hear the stones they throw upon the roof, and the gusts of wind tearing through the split walls; but *he* is in the warm and in comfort. Ah, me! I suppose he often sees the pretty child; my moth will flutter around until scorched; then his thoughts will return to me, and until then—I shall be forgotten.

"I shudder to set foot beyond my bit of garden ground; I am sure to see fair boys at pleasant play, and these recall mine own. Sometimes a page-boy from one of the large houses crosses my path—he can not understand why I draw my hand across my eyes and hurry on. He is so like my Arthur. I looked so long and wistfully upon him once, in a sort of daze, that he came up and asked me if I'd called him; many people were about, or I must have stooped to kiss him, I hungered for it so.

"I am trying to bear my trouble, but I have not the strength I had; it is harder even than I feared; but it is for his sake.

"I wonder if he ever thinks of me? I would not have him know how much I think of him. It would spoil the contentment of his now attractive life. I must suffer in silence and solitude. It is better than worrying any with my foolish old repining.

"Dare I write it?—I am sorry now I consented, even though to benefit him; there was time for this after I was dead and gone. How I wish I could remember that part of the Word which tells of when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, when the keepers of the house do tremble, and those that look out of the windows are darkened! Nobody would lend an old man like me the Word to copy it, I doubt. I'm in nobody's parish save the rook's.

"Dear little sock!—He wore it. My God! how I loved Mary's boy!

"The Book—my learning and my ruin, my half-treasure, the labor of my life—oh, what is it to my living joy! I would give it, my all, myself, myself, for but one more year, one other year, with him, with all the love restored, as it used to be. Ah, blood upon my lip? I will write no more to-night. I think an aged heart breaks easier than men deem likely."

"Lest Mary returns when I am gone, and seeks her lad, I still write more. I had thought last night to have sealed up the sheets. It is well Mary should know, and that he is happy, and cared for, and how the old forsaken man sacrificed himself for love of hers.

"Think of me, Mary, if you ever read this, as you never thought of me before. Think of me with pity. He has gone, Mary—gone; will never return to me as of old. Do they ever, once the tie is snapped? Did *you?*

"This day I made the weary pilgrimage only to see the back of that large house where he has gone. It was a toilsome way, but I kept thinking of his angel face; one glimpse and I would have lived anew; but they set the dog on me for a tramp, and—I—saw—him—not. Oh, the horrible drag back to this poor place! and now, to-night, the still more utter loneliness. I *must* see him once again. If I could but do so without his knowing it, for I dread unsettling him now. He would grow restless and unhappy. I have it! Night!

"I can conceal myself within the garden shrubbery; perhaps he draws down the blinds; I may see him thus.

"With what strength I cling to this! Would I could put the yearning far apart! God will sustain me. I *am* to see my boy again!

"But what a walk! How dark and lonely! Already the shadows seem darkening, and I feel I shall never see the little cottage more, and that this will be my last look upon the darling face. I am not sad, so I do but see him. Shall I?—shall I? What miles of suspense! I will kneel and pray that my strength may last till reaching there, that I *may* see him.

"I will set the place in order; I may never do so again.

"Should any thing happen to me, I would ask whoever may come to this poor place and may read this, my last desire, to treat the plants with tenderness; they are not valuable, but they know my hand. The dried ones are classed according to their species. All that is left is Arthur's. When older, he will value the Book as my writing. I would ask, were it not for the trouble it will give, that when they throw these aching bones away, some of my plants may be placed near; they loved me of old, and I love them.

"I may be wrong to write thus, but, after all, it can be destroyed. It is well for the aged to be ready, and my life has welled out with my love. I set my heart on three in my time—my Girl, my Boy, and my Book—and they all have failed to respond. It is quite time.

"Now, Arthur dear—"

Through the afternoon and evening of the wet and windy day which followed, the old man made that toiling progress of love, and of devotion unto death. He reached the large house long after dusk had fallen. Cold gusts blew through the white hair, and tore the old coat asunder, and coursed up and down him, as though to tear the heart out for sport of a ghastly chase upon the wold.

He concealed himself in a tangled thicket, so chill the very birds had departed thence. Reedy creaking and tapping of the sedge, and coppice growth sere with the autumn dryness, made weird utterance as he crouched waiting for the dark. Then he crept forth.

Without one star to shed a ray of welcome, with the house rising black upon the pall-like sky, and trees a seeming retinue of shrouded sentinels, he crept with faltering, shaking steps. Every blind was drawn, the place was closed securely for the night, and his sinking heart turned colder, and colder, and colder.

He stole round to the side of the house. Ivy grew thick, and framed a small upper window, where a light shone behind curtains of dimity; and because it was the sole light any where, or perchance by some Heaven-directed instinct, he kept his gaze, fast growing dim, upon that window. It seemed a long time, and by faintness he had fallen to the ground, when one within, retiring for the night, came between the curtains, and the light gleamed a halo about the golden head. He saw a little form clad all in white, draped by the snowy curtains, and he knew his prayer was heard—that his darling, like a child-angel, was there to gladden the dying gaze; and, listen! Perhaps it was his nightly custom. The boy had opened the lattice, and turning to the direction of the little cottage beyond the downs, he called, "Good-night, dear grandfather, good-night!" then closed the window gently, and let the curtains drop.

A stifled moan, a great wistful yearning of the eyes, faint foam of blood upon the lips; then, like some faithful hound, he dragged himself close to the wall, to die beneath the window of his darling. He caught at a trail of the ivy and carried it to his lips, because that was near, and because the lad once loved it. And so—with the fond eyes turned upward to his room—he died; the ivy still upon the lips.

In a village grave-yard, nestled between hills that overlooked his cottage, is a simple mound, without stone or any symbol save this—a trail of ivy at the head, about a group of herbs.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RETURN OF ST. AUBYN.

Lengthened seemed the lonely vigil in the ancestral home; thrice the watchman without shook himself, replenished the lamp, and passed off to sleep again; it was the death-like stillness and grayness that precede the dawn, and Lord Lindon stood in the great hall, below the shield bearing the emblazoned arms of his family; the scaffolding before it had been turned to account, a narrow ledge of planks having served for a platform, whereby men had been enabled to refurbish the discolored surface.

"Alas!" he murmured, "can any restore the purity of our escutcheon?" And he passed onward to that romantic demesne, the garden. He witnessed the havoc neglect and decay had caused with feelings of profoundest melancholy: his boyhood had there been joyous. Upon yon crumbling terrace a white-haired, benignant father had first led him to the throne of chivalry and honor, when he had promised his noble sire to be ever true to those instincts of their race; by that grim basin and dusky fountain he recalled a dignified lady of grave yet pleasant speech, and manners always gentle—his mother! She had sat beside it, telling him of his grandfather, and grandfathers beyond, and he recalled how he had sported with the dolphins in the sun for change, thinking one spray-dashed dolphin alive and all a-gleam was worth a dozen dead grandfathers mouldering in the vaults of Lindon. He thought of it now reproachfully. The satyrs stared upon him with blear-eyed vacancy, and the night-lizard, crouched upon the shoulder of a nymph, faced the intruder from below her carved locks of stone. Flowers every where, wild and luxuriant, weeds growing rank and high, shrubs combining to prevent advance, and trees that interlaced above formed a miniature forest awning. It was sad; it was beautiful. He quitted it with mingled feelings, love for the old place predominant; and long before the coming workmen had crossed the green, he had walked along Sleperton village, and the quaint High Street of old Seaborough, that verily seemed unchanged in a name. He reached Seaborough station before even the large doors were unbolted by a drowsy porter, and waited in the dull, musty waiting-room the coming of a train. It was a time of dreariness. Upon the platform a lad swept the level boards with a broom fashioned in the shape of a rake, a man was cleaning the lamps, a woman was upon her knees scrubbing by the booking-place, a porter was sitting upon the weighing-machine, eating his breakfast from a saucer released from a handkerchief; flowers were trailing beyond the platform, where the master had a bit of garden ground, and where some local artist had designed Seaborough in oyster shells upon the bank of mould. A young girl came into the station—some comely country lass about the age of his girl at home; and he looked upon her kindly, asking if she had walked far that morning. "Yes, a goodish step, and would the train be long?" He could not tell her, knowing as little of it as did those grandfathers driven hither in their old-fashioned coaches. A young man, in black vestments of abbreviated pattern, entered noisily, and, unlocking with more noise the door of the ticket office, passed behind, where he made more noise still, banging books, fighting stools, thrashing a stray cat of which Seaborough had been despoiled all night, counting his coin, clicking the telegraph machine, arranging that geographical puzzle the ticket cells, and was busy over much other preparatory work; midst of which his eminence the station-master entered, with a chrysanthemum in his button-hole and a carbuncle on his nose; this affliction evidently made him constitutionally cross, for he abused the servants all round, and made a rush at the country lass as though he would eat her.

His lordship was glad to leave the place, dreading one or other of the gossips dropping in might recognize him. It was a chill, comfortless journey to town, but he thought of home, and it made the distance shorter; why, he had not been away from Lena as long before, all the time they had been together.

Later, he knew again, as on the previous day, that singular sensation of revisiting the great metropolis after an interval of several years, one of the most peculiar experiences that can befall one. . . . .

By sunset he stood at the foot of the cliff whereon his house was built. Here could just be seen a glimpse of the chimney-stack above the trees: and, quickly following the track of bramble-bordered pathway that wound upward to the plateau, he was speedily before the gate, and ringing its sonorous summons lustily, half hoping his idol would herself hasten to admit him. It was a soft and light footstep advancing over the stone court, yet in his eagerness it seemed very slow, and he rated himself for his impatience. The gate was unlocked and unbolted, and there stood Mrs. Brandon, dreadfully black and white, with a fine lawn handkerchief in hand, with which she just brushed her eyes, as though removing traces of tears she had heroically checked. And he, so quick to discern all little things, stood dismayed before so vivid an appearance of emotion; and he thought at first his Lena had been willful, had been grieving this faithful guardian in his absence; but when he remarked a deeper gloom than such would warrant, and a stricken look, which he knew a woman might wear under weight of severest sorrow, he became alarmed in earnest, and hurriedly entreated to know the cause. . . . .

"Will you kindly let me close the gate, Mr. St. Aubyn, and then step to my sitting-room? And do not look so alarmed, Sir; I admit it is serious, yes, serious, but nothing, I hope, you may not set right; but do, pray, be calm! If you get so excited, I will not say a word!"

His deathly paleness made even her pause on the threshold of the blasting revelation.

"Tell me," he said, breathlessly, as soon as he had entered, and clutching her wrist: "Lena?"

"Is well!"

"Thank God!" sinking upon a chair; such wild and awful thoughts had flashed upon him. "Bring her to me," he begged, faint and shaken.

The quiet woman stood beside him, and, with forbearance and deeply sympathetic utterance, entered upon the task.

"You are of a brave nature, Mr. St. Aubyn. Brave natures are ever prepared for—for misfortune."

"What is the meaning of all this?" he cried, in agony. "If you have any thing to say, in mercy's name say it; do not fear for me. Ah, I can guess! That man, John Beech, has been here; he has seen my darling, he has been rude, has frightened her. I understand it all."

"No, Sir, your enemies are nearer home—"

"Heavens! What can the woman mean? Speak it out, madam. What is this thing, that you must so beat about the bush with it? Remember you have a man to deal with, to whom all this is child's play." His teeth were close set, hands convulsively doubled; and although so firm, she could see he trembled from head to foot, and she asked herself, "Whatever was in the chit to produce all this commotion?" Then softly, and manifestly with delicate reluctance, she resumed the work of breaking her ill-omened news.

"I mean, Mr. St. Aubyn, we have cherished a viper in this house in that woman Martha Saxe."

"In Martha Saxe?"

"Ay, in Martha Saxe. The day you left, Sir—But there, I—can—not, so it's no use." And, supremely affected, this good companion and guardian leaned back in her chair and wept a judicious little shower—not one tear too many or one too few, and all so quietly as though deeply felt; no vulgar outburst of vociferous grief such as poor Saxe would have indulged in, but this tranquil outpouring of her pathetic sympathy; and spite of the confusion of imaginary terrors, St. Aubyn thought how true a friend was this who felt so deeply.

"Go on," he said, gently and calmly; "do not fear for me. I can bear any thing."

"The day you left, Sir, that woman left, went off without a word to any one. But this is not all; and you will please prepare for that sorrowful remainder I would most willingly keep back—"

"Go on!" he spoke sternly, the words might have been iron-delivered.

"Miss Lena has also disappeared—I do not say with her, but both left this house within ten minutes of each other, as I ascertained; and if that base person has decoyed the dear young lady from her home, under pretense of complying with her oft-repeated wish to see the world, why, all I can say is, the woman ought to be handed over to justice and severely punished."

She had not raised her voice, made no unpleasant disturbance, but the grave solemnity indicated her abhorrence of a heinous crime. She might have been the Goddess of Justice herself, so calmly stern was that denunciation.

And he? Stood so utterly dumfounded no word would come. Answer it! How could he answer it? Suspect its truth! Why that even? His darling was stolen, or—had fled; and, remembering all that had transpired of late, the last seemed as probable. Either was too horrible for thinking of; but they pressed him sore, were merciless, would have him confront all their dark and awful meaning, and brought with them a surrounding of horrors so poignant, the man would have given his right hand to swoon from their recollection. But the presence was keen, vivid, piercing; it flayed and scathed and crushed him; and without any word he strode off to his study, the door of which he tremblingly locked. On all sides were reminders of the child—half-completed paintings brought in for him to see, then left unfinished; some dainty work in silk and wool, contrived in colors of his choice; the couch and skins, her favorite seat, with the book she had just been reading; the sweet group of flowers her hand had gathered and placed in the vase beside his desk: and in the extremity of his pain he looked, half nervously, round the room for any sign, a line or two in the pretty handwriting, some explanation, the least token of farewell, but there was nothing.

At any time the effect of this blow would have been prostrating, but following upon the ordeal of returning to the old home, it found him already tried and weak, less able than ever to undergo this second faithless desertion.

"I must be a man!" The hollow desolate utterance gave the lie to that resolute yet despairing tone. "I must bestir myself; there is not a moment to be lost; they may be traced; I may yet rescue her; I will not sit down under the crushing blow while my darling, so helpless, so innocent, is adrift upon the world! If she wished to leave me and— Oh! this can not be; it would be her ignorance and longing for novelty, natural under the circumstances. I will try not to think ill of her; I dread it! I am much to blame; I should not have isolated her so completely from the society of others, and the scenes she longed to see; perhaps I have been selfish, foolish, mistaken; yes! I would think it more my fault than hers, my darling's, who surely loved me too well ever to forsake me!"

Calmer, incidental attendant aspects flashed upon him, and he looked at it, and tried to think it was nothing but a girl's high-spirited freak: and he knew that when a girl does do a fool-hardy thing, it is ten times more monstrous and unaccountable than a boy's. Lena had taken this step recklessly, impulsively, without weighing any consequences or bestowing any thought, and certainly without calculating treachery to himself or to her love for him; thus he sought to gain comfort. The brunt of the shock was past, and, like many tremendous shocks, it galvanized him to artificial strength and instant action. And so when there came a gentle, ever so gentle and considerate, tap at the door, and the woman of the panther step entered with a little arrow-root, biscuits, a tiny liqueur glass, and fanciful atoms of toast, all upon a snowy tray-cloth arranged with the nicety of a wife or a mother, she was confronted, to her surprise and chagrin, by that figure at its utmost dignity, and a smile full of both confidence and hope.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE OLD MUSICIAN.

An elderly man; rather plain of feature; meagre, gaunt, and cadaverous: not prepossessing, but he played the violin—divinely.

Member of the orchestra in a popular theatre, Strandwards.

A dweller with others in the plainest house of a plain terrace, the landlady whereof was plain, and a gossip to boot.

One evening the woman pricked her finger, and gossiped on—slight matter; next day the finger commenced gathering, and pain set in; the woman groaned, gossiping still; the day following, a slovenly maid was sent for Dr. Nichols, who had an extensive practice in that suburb. He lanced, she winced, tongue running nineteen to the dozen on her lodgers and their antecedents this hundred years, among others him she styled "the Fiddleman."

He had one room, half-way to the top; had occupied that room eleven years without leaving any thing upon the mantel-piece, but two evenings ago had, by accident, left an envelope thereon; and, also by accident, she had looked therein, to see—to her shocked surprise—the short-skirted figure of a child-dancer, pet of some low ballet troupe; pretty, she was forced to admit, but the idea! She soon settled that small outrage by throwing it in the fire: such things lying about her house, indeed!

Groaning came on here, and she said no more; the doctor thought no more, returned his case to his pocket, and departed.

About three weeks afterward, as Dr. Nichols was sitting down to dinner, he was called to No. 7 Croft's Place, to which semi-select locality he hastened at once. An uncomely specimen of womanhood ushered him up stairs, muttering something about a gentleman's daughter from the theatre; the poor girl was feverish, she thought. He passed into an untidy, smoke-dried room, and the scene presented may be thus described: a small bed, where, beneath a patchwork coverlet, a child was restlessly turning a flushed, beautiful face from the fire, before which was kneeling a gaunt man, endeavoring to toast a piece of bread; a picture or two on the walls; a shell box on the mantel, and two vases with artificial flowers; a small table whereon was a work-box, a music score, a play-bill, a dish of preserve, and some confectionery; a threadbare carpet, a rug worked with fierce peacocks, a hassock patched with shreds of an old dog-skin jacket, two tumbled muslin skirts with tinsel ornaments, a faded paper wreath, a Watteau hat of common material but bewitching style; and, placed in one corner, a violin-case.

The woman went out, pushing the door roughly; the man continued his toasting, but apologized. He was about to make some toast-and-water; his little girl was tormented by thirst. There was something almost as feverish about the man as the child; he was terribly anxious, as was betrayed by every movement, by the agonized eagerness with which he watched the doctor's face while feeling the little sufferer's pulse, by his gasping, breathless,

"Well, doctor?"

His suspense was quieted upon the assurance that the fever was within check. A nasty low disorder, the outcome of late hours and gas, all weathers and undue exercise, poor living and excess of excitement, and a generally overwrought system. The child's beauty was very marked, and, seen with that hectic splendor, created an admiring interest altogether apart from professional sympathy. Brown curls tossed hotly back upon the pillow, and eyes flashing with a dangerous light, arms outstretched as seeking for some cool, refreshing shadow; parched lips consumed and curved longingly for fruit, or fragrant kisses of cold snow-drops, or violets yet sprinkled with the dew. The man, with infinite patience, held his bread before the miserable fire, looking from it to the child with rapid glances of love and care.

"You have nothing to fear. I will send my lad with some mixture, which please administer according to directions. Take care of the window; it's rather draughty. Keep her well covered; don't leave her—"

A moan here from the man, betraying great feeling.

"Alas, Sir, I am compelled to attend my duties at the theatre."

"Oh, of course—nobody to stay with her."

"I always lock the door; I could not leave it open in a house like this. We are poor" (with diffidence); "one day we may be more comfortably situated" (staring upon the toast as though it represented a chart of life).

"I will send our maid to sit with your little one during the evening, if it can be managed, until your return from the performance."

This being proposed out of simple kindliness, the doctor was altogether unprepared for the ebullition of gratitude that followed. Wheeling round, still upon his knees, the man cordially expressed his thanks, and in such a trembling voice, it seemed no common love, this of the old musician for his child.

The doctor's lady, however, took exception to the project; it was unusual and dangerous, for the people were evidently of inferior degree; professional visiting was one thing, but if every medical man was supposed to send his domestics to sit with the patients, what on earth would become of the kitchens? He did not press the point; he never did; experience warned him that the more points are sharpened, the weaker become arguments. The girl was quite in her mistress's confidence, and, even had he insisted, would have been any thing but an agreeable companion for the little patient, in whom he felt so keen an interest. He dispatched his page to the old nurse it was their custom to employ, for certain valuable qualities not general with the order; but the woman was away, and he began to be apprehensive his intentions would be frustrated. Then a consultation ensued in the surgery between the good doctor and his page, in whom he placed wonderful confidence, the boy having something more than a pretty face and engaging manners to recommend him—a tact and tenderness as valuable as they were becoming. The doctor had the boy from his brother-in-law, Joseph Blake, in whose country house he had won golden opinions; and the doctor's sister, Mrs. Joseph Blake, expressed herself sorry beyond measure to part with him; but a sad occurrence had happened, which seemed to prey upon the boy's spirits; he was evidently dull and unhappy; and Joseph, who felt some little remorse, although in his blunt good nature his designs had been of the best, contrived this change of scene: and the boy, who was as sensitive as he was sensible, appreciating this, and liking his new home, although not his new life, appeared the happier for the change.

"Perhaps Mrs. Jenkins would oblige me for an hour or two?"

This was in allusion to the kind-hearted wife of the grocer at the corner, whom the doctor had been the humble instrument of restoring to health, and who, like most of his patients, was very poor; indeed, life was so much a struggle with the pair, he had never sent in his bill, awaiting better times for the worthy tradesman. It occurred to him this person would be able to watch during the worst of the hours, those of absence of the kind guardian. He had detected at once that the man was no relative; but, after long London experience in poor quarters, and among the kindly souls who toil and struggle, one loses surprise at coming upon odd protection of the young: and we take it as indisputable that any protection is better than none in the grim city. The doctor's heart was very large and full of pity for those having no helper, and who were engaged in work of a dangerous character. Such he considered the occupation of the child-dancers of the theatres, exposed to temptation of all sorts, to which the exercise in the unnatural heat renders them peculiarly susceptible, contaminating and unhealthy influences besetting them from all quarters. His residence was situated near to a large theatre, and close by a colony of those whose little ones helped to make the spectacle poetic and graceful; it had thus been his lot to come much in the way of these, and to observe the evil effects arising from the forced life.

His boy returned promptly. There was no need to ask the result; the features were so mobile, utterance was interpreted before ever the lips were opened. The man was away; there was no one else to mind the shop, or she would have come to him at once; and in this quarter it was customary for the shops to be kept open until past eleven o'clock.

By this time the man had, no doubt, left the sick child, to attend to his duties, and the doctor could realize the anxiety of his mind while accompanying the gay and grotesque show upon his instrument. The medicine must be sent, for it was most imperative that it should be administered at once. He knew it was impossible to depend upon that coarse and slovenly woman at the house, or any of her kin, who, moreover, were best out of the chamber. He was placed by his own humanity in a dilemma of feeling which a cooler practitioner would have adjusted by permitting matters to take their course. This he could not do, although how to remedy affairs in so serious an emergency he was unable to solve. Then came his gentle boy to the relief, blue eyes all lighted up with the tender solicitude witnessed beside his dead grandfather, when he had patiently sat out the night hours unwearily watching where none heard his sobbing prayers. Could he be of service here? He had to go with the medicine. Might he administer the proper portion, hand fruit or drink, and stay until the return of the musician? Having weighed this well, it seemed to the doctor an opportune proposal, and one way at least out of the difficulty. With the medicine and fruit and certain little delicacies his boy set forth, gas-light from the shop windows gilding his curls, a ruby glow from the doctor's surgery lamp flooding his fair young face, while turning to bid a respectful adieu.

An hour later, having occasion to go very near the house, the doctor called to see how the little sufferer was progressing. To his remark that he would go up to the room, the woman gave a surly nod, and flounced to some lower region, from whence came sounds of lamentation and woe.

The door was slightly ajar. He entered noiselessly, and found his page bending over the child, wiping the moisture from her brow with infinite tenderness. He never forgot her beaming glance at the beautiful face leaning over her with brotherly sympathy. The picture was so pretty, he did not speak, but waited in the doorway. Smoothing the sheet and tucking the coverings close, the boy turned to resume his seat beside the bed, when, catching sight of the doctor, he quietly and without embarrassment gave place, remarking, in low tones,

"The carriages and noise outside seem to disturb her, Sir."

"Has she been delirious at all?"

"Only restless; sometimes talking of the theatre, fearful of a mistake in the figure."

"I can wait five or ten minutes, if you would like a walk during that time."

When the boy had gone, the doctor had leisure to observe the child, and for once was full of regret that the art of the painter had never been his. The hectic transparency lent charm to the features, in themselves of an exquisite moulding; and, whatever the opinion of the old violin-player, the doctor certainly experienced profound regret that so fair a creature should be thus prostrated, the young life consuming itself. She awoke from a short interval of painful slumber, opened her large eyes wide upon him, and spoke as one struggling from out of a dream.

Where is shed a holier life than in the awakening from some dream in childhood? What lovelier than those rose-hued, chaste transitions, when the soul is winged and comes back to consciousness with half-reluctant, half-eager fluttering?

"Where is he?" asked the child, timidly, looking round the room.

"It is not yet time for his return, my dear; it is but ten o'clock; the performance is not over for an hour yet."

"Where is he?" she repeated, looking troubled and eager. Then, as though to herself, "One doesn't feel kisses in dreams—not real kisses."

"You mistake, my child; I am the doctor. My little page has been watching beside you in case your illness should take a turn; he was only wiping your forehead. His gentleness led you to believe it a fairy's kiss."

She leaned upon her elbow, and, looking at the doctor with grave decision, said,

"I tell you he kissed me—I know what kisses are; and he knelt by this bed and prayed I might soon be better."

Here was a revelation, of original sin or original goodness—which?

"Well, now tell me what is the matter here?" taking seat beside the bed, and feeling the quick, irregular pulse.

"I think I caught cold coming home from the theatre."

"Very likely. What do you do there?"

"I dance in the fairy scene."

"Just so—muslin skirts up to the knees—little or nothing under the skirts—draughts from all quarters; then you blame it on God's good weather! Very wrong of you, little fairy."

She smiled faintly at his petulance, and replied, in similar spirit,

"There's winds as well as draughts, and we haven't too much to wear, outside."

"And—your father?"

"Always waits for me and sees me home here, and often wraps me in his own great-coat. I owe every thing to him, except my engagement at the theatre."

Of the many idyls the doctor had met with in common life, none had so aroused his interest as this of the old violin-player. He hoped to hear more of the story; he had been a close student of psychological phenomena, and this was not the kind upon which he had bestowed least attention.

Around the room were evidences of much quiet thought on the part of the home-maker. Grapes on a chair by the bedside, violets in a little vase, a book of pictures, and covers of old music gorgeous with drabbled hues; a framed piece of color hung where it would meet the invalid's gaze; apparel neatly folded and arranged with reverent care; charred remains of a play-bill, as though the burner hated the sight of them; a man's walking-stick, and with it a small gingham umbrella. He took all in with a medical man's quick perception, and the result presented itself as a kind and watchful good genius at work in this small abode.

"Now, little girl, pay great attention to what I am going to say. To get well, you will take the medicine I shall send, and keep as quiet as you can, certainly not tossing about in that restless fashion; to keep well, you will have to give up the theatre."

Her face clouded over in an instant; the life was exercising its fatal fascination.

"He says so," murmured the girl, as though impressed by the coincidence; and then, pleadingly, to the adviser: "I should be sorry to do that; in time I shall be in the front row, and have fifteen instead of seven shillings a week."

"Well, we will not talk about that now; but I'm sorry to see you so fond of it. How long have you been doing this?"

"Ever since poor mother died, two years ago; a kind woman where we lived (the landlady) took me one day to the manager, and he had me taught; I heard him say my face wasn't much, but my hair, if attended to, would be magnificent, and that my legs would be his fortune!" (with *naïveté* impossible to render here).

"Very pretty indeed! And I suppose it never occurred to you to object to this appraisement?"

"I don't know what that is, but I slapped the call-boy's face because he was rude to me. I've only to complain to father if any one insults me, and *he* soon settles it."

"Why do you say 'father?'"

"It's more convenient, and saves talking, besides being the most proper name. If you only knew his goodness, Sir!" Eyes filling with tears at the recollection of the long service of love.

"I do know it, my child. How came it first about?"

"From seeing me every night, and knowing I was quite alone in the world, I suppose. In the whirl and passing of the dance I always found his eyes upon me, watching me as my mother used to watch when I went an errand down the street; and I grew to love those eyes, and to smile at him and no one else, at every coming round. Then he waited for me at the stage-door, and used to take me out, and to church on Sundays; and so we became fast friends, and will remain so all our lives."

"I hope so," the doctor replied, devoutly; "but not if you ask for the fancied kissers of your dreams."

Whereat she blushed, waxed angry, and turned her back upon him.

"Ah, well, my child, do not mind me; I am old and cross-grained, yet would be your friend." The doctor looked at his watch, saying kindly, "It is time for me to go; I may be sent for at my house. You will be all right until your father's coming, and as your nurse has returned, I will leave you in his care."

Arthur behaved with discretion, taking a book and seating himself by the fire. This child seemed so different to Rose Blake, scarcely of a like order of humanity; the beauty here was wild, and of an untamed type; its physical aspect, perhaps, presenting a more striking picture, with the deep brown of hair and eyes; the dark complexion, fever-hued with mocking health, vivacity, and *esprit*, even in sickness lending singular charm to this waif of Bohemia. Yet even as his memory of the chemist's child was that one exquisite jewel of life, the first dream, he did not so much as turn toward this other until she called him. Afterward he recounted to his friend, the sympathetic Dr. Nichols, all that transpired, and a very ingenuous and original narration it was.

"I turned some time afterward, Sir, thinking the little girl asleep, not having spoken: but she was looking at me, wide-awake, so I went on with my reading. Presently she said, 'The doctor told you to watch by me.' 'So I am, miss,' I answered. 'I call that watching by the fire. Why don't you come and tell me a story?' I did so, about a book I had from the Sunday-school last week. 'Do you like Sunday-schools?' I asked of her. 'Don't know what they are,' she answered; 'I think I should like the theatres best.' Then I said, 'I'm sorry for your taste, miss.' 'I wish you wouldn't keep Missing me so much,' she cried, angrily; 'save that for your little friends on Sunday, Sir!' and she turned her back upon me. I continued reading, wishing her father would come; but she looks so pretty when cross—so pretty—I could not help looking up now and then; and once she caught me, but then she must have been looking on the sly. 'I say,' she said, 'does your Sunday-school teach you to kiss folks that can not defend themselves?' at which I looked down, for I have always so wished I had a little sister, and I had dared to think for a moment how happy I should be with such a one. I answered, 'I meant no harm; I ask your pardon; it was no wrong kiss.' 'Well, since you explain so prettily, you may have another—kiss me, nurse.' She looked so demure in ordering me, and I was so glad to be good friends, that I did so. And then we had some fruit each, talking about when she was well, what pleasant walks we'd have, if you were willing. I said, 'Perhaps your father won't like it, Amy'—she wished me to call her Amy—'because in that case we would do nothing of the sort.' 'You're a very good boy,' she said; 'but let me tell you he is a dear, kind, loving one, and won't mind a bit.' I told her you had said she wasn't to talk, but to keep quiet; and there she was running on and as fidgety as ever she could be. She said, 'Well, how should you like to be lying here, when you ought to be with the *coryphées?*' I answered, 'But then I should never want to be with the *coryphées*.' 'Ah, you may talk, but you haven't seen me in the lime-light, in new *tulle*, and with a diamond star in my hair, at the parting!' 'I dare say you look very pretty, Amy; the plainest of girls is improved under those circumstances.' 'That's a horrid throw at me.' 'No, it is not meant in that way; but you must and shall keep quiet, or I will go; why, you are much more flushed than you were! Do, to please me and all of us!' She was quiet after that, and before long had gone to sleep. The little piece of candle—you remember the small piece it was, Sir?—burned down and out; I could not find another; there was no bell. I listened for the landlady's coming, and asked for her, and was told she had gone out for the evening. The woman I spoke to, who has the rooms above, said she burned lamps, or would lend me an end: and then went in and closed her door loudly; there was nothing to do but wait till her father returned. I drew up the blind; the moonlight fell across the centre of the room; one of her hot hands strayed over the quilt; I took it and placed it underneath; the movement, careful as it was, awoke her, or appeared to do so; but she had changed, and seemed all excitement. Catching sight of the moonlight on the boards and on the white skirts, she started with a cry, threw her arms up, jumped from the bed, and dashed into the maddest dance I ever saw; there where the moonlight—"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the doctor, interrupting the young narrator very anxiously; "a pretty thing came of leaving you in charge! Why, the child was delirious again—must have been!"

"I implored of her to go quietly back to bed; she only replied by a peal of laughter, and at that moment her father stood in the doorway. I could not see his face, but the cry he gave was more horrible than any we heard in the hospital that day when we had to go to see the poor man who was taken there."

"And what did he do? whatever could he think?"

"Well, Sir, he seemed more put out at my being there than he would have been at finding her alone: he was rather gruff, did not thank me, and bade me not to come again."

"I can understand it; that I will set right in the morning. But the girl, how is she now? What turn did the frenzy take?"

"Faintness, with shivering, and asking for water. He put her back, and after a little while she was calm—not asleep, but as still."

"All is well; the passion spent itself. She will be better after this."

In the morning the doctor was at the house rather earlier than it was his custom to call upon patients. Croft's Place was not improved by daylight; and No. 7 was, if any thing, the most objectionable in the rank of houses.

In all London terraces, below a certain grade, there is great uniformity in the matter of dinginess, dirtiness, untidiness, and smokiness. Why the features should be peculiar to London, and characteristic of these grim rows of dwellings, is a problem the most enlightened citizen would have to commune with his wife upon.

The pretty patient was considerably better, yet with traces of the struggle painfully visible. Dr. Nichols shook hands with her guardian, who had been the devoted watcher through the night: he looked haggard and worn.

"Why, friend, you must not lose your rest like this, or I shall have *you* upon my list; uneasy as you have been, there is no need for fear. You have passed the night in terror?"

"I have passed the night in prayer."

"And your prayer has been mercifully answered; your child is better."

"Not mercifully; I prayed my child might die."

"*Die!* Why, man, what shocking wickedness is this?"

He stood with dignity that surprised the other, and, with calmness, said,

"I owe you an explanation."

He motioned to a chair; the doctor sat down; he continued standing with a hand upon its back, but in such a way that his eyes were never lifted from that loving vigil.

"You know I am employed in the orchestra of the theatre close by, of which I have been a member for some years, and I have worked diligently and regularly in my profession. Perhaps you know little of our lives. Although night after night facing a whirl of excitement, there is dreadful monotony; and the same thing year after year, and every night of the year, with exception of the blessed Sabbaths, is very wearying. The only change is afforded by that of the stage itself. A new play is welcomed by no one so heartily as by the musicians, who usher it in and link its shifting pictures. Privately, apart from this, my life has been a sad and lonely one; I have known much trouble, disappointment, difficulty, and sickness; I have been very isolated, with no one to love me, and nothing to love. Of course, in an insignificant being like the violin-player of a theatre, that is a matter of little moment—I only mention it.

"Well, Sir, stationed as we are, in such close view of the actors upon the stage, one is sure to take a liking for one or other of those so frequently brought to the fore: yet have I seen a procession of fair faces without experiencing interest in any—I speak of the younger men. I think I used to watch the children with most pleasure, yet with pain, for I sorrowed to see their fresh young beauty grow paler night by night, and the lissom limbs lose measure in the progress of the dance. From when this little face shone forth upon the old boards, a new interest in the place seemed aroused within me; it was like a fairer flower, and I loved it—I loved it!"

His worn sad face had softened to inexpressible fondness, the eyes never lifted from the flushed beauty upon the pillow.

"I was told some woman, not the mother of this child, had brought her to the theatre, and offered her on sale, or loan, or hire, if they could make any thing out of her. From one to another the child was tossed, a general favorite and public property; the manager used to recompense first one and then another of the women to see to her. I would watch for her as eagerly as though my own; the little face became to me the star of that strange world; I never played so well as when the sweet child shone to my music. While her swift feet worked the tracery of its measures, her eyes would flash to the sound in rhythm, more perfect than any accompaniment of voice; and when the child was off the stage the lights seemed dull and all the place was dim. I had no interest beyond the notes, save for wondering what she was doing and in what company she might be cast. It is a morbid instrument, the violin, Sir: one falls a-thinking over its tune. I was always thinking of the poor young thing, with never a father's or a mother's care and love to keep it good and pure and innocent. Thus month after month went on, and I marked the expanding of her beauty and growth of her fragile frame, even in that artificial and forcing life. At last a great comfort fell upon me—I attracted her attention, her interest, her affection: she could not but mark the constant scrutiny always in that one spot. She did! She did!" At this, with a passionate outburst, he clasped his hands, and stooping, kissed her fondly.

"From that moment we were friends, good friends: she confided all her little cares and sorrows, asked advice, and sought assistance at *my* hands. I gave her all; and that she might be better provided for, set aside the half of my salary for her especial use. She grew straight and strong and beautiful, and I knew my first great grief when rude eyes of stranger patrons were caught by the symmetry too faultlessly perfect to pass in the crowd. I grew restless and uneasy, and racked by a mighty pain. Her mixing with those of the profession was sufficient cause, but when it came to molestation from the public—or that part of it existing to wreck and ruin—I was ever at her elbow to protect her from insult and temptation. I have won a victory—in taking her from old companions; I may yet complete it. O that I could take her from the stage! But she is so wedded to it by association and liking, she pines and is miserable if removed but for a night. Believe me, I *have* tried, by all the means human ingenuity could devise, to raise her from that. But I notice the love of the hollow horrible life increasing and growing with her growth; the pleasure and excitement, the vanity and ambition, combine to enchain her whole heart and soul, and if persevered in, they will result in her destruction. Then do you wonder at my prayer, unloving and impious though it seem? Ah, if you knew the depth of this love for my darling, you would cease to wonder! Better, far better, for the good Lord to save her while there is time: my influence may not suffice, I scarcely think it; and I am not strong, and aweary, so weary!"

The tone died away to a plaint that was so very pathetic it moved the doctor, and, taking his trembling hand, he attempted a little common-sense argument.

"My good friend, you are letting your morbidness, your sensitive apprehensiveness, run away with your reason. Although I disapprove of the theatre on the score of health, and perhaps on moral grounds, I believe it to be as possible for a child to be uncontaminated in its atmosphere as in that of most other forms of apprenticeship. Still, it is uncertain, and once the seed has sunk, it is no longer on the surface to be traced, unfortunately for some of us. You can not have been and can not be with your child every minute of her time, and it seems to me, in going to sea in a doubtful craft, one must at least prepare for a wreck, and rather blame one's self than Providence. Do not think me hard; I am but representing the matter practically. Were you a man of fortune, with nothing to do but hedge in your *protégée* from others and the world, the case would be different; but even then you could not root out the past, supposing a past. I confess I have not much faith in human nature of whatever age; but at this, I imagine, it is rather worse than any other. I am sorry to say my theories are not to the credit of my kind. If you, who are older and *have* known wounds, can entertain faith and experience confidence, so much the better, although it appears to me very like crawling down the jagged wall of an earthquake. Depend upon this, the happiest people in the world are those who feel nothing, who lay themselves open to no sensibility, shut eyes and ears to every thing, especially every thing emotional, and who go on their way disturbing about nothing and disturbed by nobody, either to love or to hate. These are the people who live so long, and who crow over the graves of such as you and I. My candor pains you, and I am sorry, but I have spoken in honest sympathy. My thanks for your confidence; it shall not be misplaced: any time I can be of service, command me."

He grasped the kind hand at this, and exclaimed,

"You can; and now! Receive her into your house to wait upon your lady; train her to be good, and useful, and pure—you can do it all better than I—and she would still be mine, *mine*, to be taken some day when I have put by sufficient; but it would be better now to see her in some quiet home circle."

"With great pleasure, my friend. I trust, nay, I am sure, when I put it properly to her, my wife will not object; but yourself—what will you do without your little favorite?"

He looked upward with a sublime and trustful expression.

"It is for her good. For my love I will bear to part with her; besides" (eagerly), "you will permit her to come and see me. Ah, my darling" (leaning over the child), "you will be safe there, safe!"

Broken, uncertain utterance from the restless sleeper, and they heard this:

"Kiss me—once more—call that last a kiss? Why, they burn me through after the dancing. Quick! the doctor will be here; but we will be alone again in moonlight, and love when he has gone. How pretty you are, and not rude to me, like those at the play! *You* are the prince I've danced with all this time. I've fancied your beauty—seen it every night; all the dance long it has led me like a splendor till I've lost myself, and —you—are here!"

The old man was ghastly. Lower and lower the head had sunk, the gaunt form being all drawn up and bent.

This man, with his simple idyl and mad hope, moved the doctor to infinite pity. He pressed his hand with sympathy of no common order, and walked to the window. He felt in some measure responsible for this piece of pain. Although done with the best of motives, the best of motives, as is usual, proved the worst of friends, and by the new light he saw another mistake. If man would but be guided by his wife, who counsels often not wisely but too well!

He looked forth—people in emergency have no alternative but to look forth. His inspection of nature without was not re-assuring; it was the usual dismal yet varied London back-view vista of chimneys, panorama of tiles, grim lengths of parapet and serried ranks of sloping slate, dizzy corners, and stone edgings overhanging the streets. To the right, a large advertising station, all aflame with a huge painting of the fairy scene from a theatre-spectacle near by, where little ones were pursued by evil, and rescued by good genii, with all the other pageant of the poetic allegory; at an angle, the windowed wall and crowded lamps of a gin palace; at the rear, the glass roof of a photographer's; a deserted chicken walk; some boxes of leafless shrub; a rope dangling from house to house, upon which an array of linen fluttering to the public edification; two cats at drawn battle over a fallen sparrow; and a woman dancing a baby at an upper window. Turning round, he found the man, deadly pale, standing with hands clasped behind him, looking down upon the little burning face.

The doctor was shocked at the stony calmness and laid his hand upon the man's shoulder.

"Come," he said, "you feel things too much; you suffer this to trouble you more than there is occasion for."

He was saying "Good-by," when, speaking very softly, he added,

"We neither of us foresaw this. You will change your decision, and remain, as you most properly are, the child's best friend."

He was staring vacantly over at the brown old instrument, and with one stride he was up beside it, clutching with convulsive fondness, as though returning to *the unchanged.* He tapped it half fondly, as to say, "This, this is my all!" Then he turned feverishly to the doctor.

"You will forgive me if I play? This has borne my suffering before."

Without awaiting permission, he dashed off upon a strain of unearthly utterance; wild and weird, more a fantastic, horrible wailing than any melody; now soaring to an illimitable comprehension of anguish, now plunging as in throes of dire extremity, now sinking to quivering solos of keen tenderness and anguish. The doctor gazed upon the man as upon one demented.

It was not agreeable nor clever, and blindly passionate; it was agony bursting from the bow. The doctor looked the old musician calmly in the face.

"If—you—play—thus—you—will—break—a—string!"

The measured words checked the outburst, the playing changed to the very opposite—a harum-scarum dance piece and medley of vicious airs. This he interchanged by variations upon a string that was more eloquent than any cry of any human heart. The frenzy of merriment rose and sharpened until it became a shrill shriek of hysterical hilarity: keener, more acutely vivid; and the doctor covered his ears. The man took no notice; he was beside himself. All the endurance of months and untold suffering; all the fears and terrors and blind, passionate yearning; all the love and grim waste of uncared-for life, came out as a libretto to that fantasia of mad excitement; and through it all, the airs he rendered every night, from repetition the part and parcel of his spirit, a horrible travesty upon his pain, a Satanic dual-anguish with the opera of his madness. And more biting, cutting, stinging, clove from the strings that dread strain; more screaming, mirthful, and exquisitely tempestuous, a very hurricane of glee, with notes of awful torture heard in the storm. Wild yells crept forth and were scoured about by the jovial crew of wondering long-drawn echoes, pealed forth with discordant clangor, or quivered with solemn and mournful distress through the thrilled air. It was a great and horrible performance of sound—music of a ghastly kind. As it intensified, the child moved uneasily, and struggled as though under the influence of some mighty power, and opening wide her sparkling eyes, seeming to distend at every nerve and drink in the melody to the utmost quiver of its fierce contention; starting up in bed, on the bed, off the bed, on to the floor, and there in the one gleam of sunshine breaking into the maddest dance eyes ever witnessed. The experience of the doctor's gentle page had in part prepared him for some such exhibition as this, a fit accompaniment to that frenzy from the violin. Never would he forget that frantic tarantula—a new phase in his medical experience. Professional brethren, to whom he afterward spoke of it in confidential conference, assured him that, although rare, such ebullitions are by no means impossible with certain acutely constituted natures. He was compelled to admit, however, this instance stood alone in his personal experience. The excitement aroused or let loose by the strain had seized upon the child, and she danced with delirious glee, with such rapidity the doctor became alarmed; the player caught the infection. He noticed it, and was glad. At that moment, with the final effort of his expiring strength, a string broke; the sound ceased, the violin falling upon the ground, and the child sinking into the doctor's arms outstretched to save her, for his knowledge of hysterical fits warned him of the reaction to ensue—the faintness and exhaustion inevitable. The man himself sat panting like some beast after a hard chase, with the note of the hunter yet upon the wind. The doctor placed a damp towel upon the white little brow, perfectly white now, he was rejoiced to see. He held her firm, that is, made the firmness felt; for although the excitement had subsided, there were struggling, panting throes as of some evil spirit, subdued and bound, shaking the slight lithe form revengefully. A shattered, smitten little girl, fainting and flushed, throbbing, and with lilies rising above the burned scarlet: a mere bird subjected to the torture, and, bird-like, nestling on his bosom; lying back, wearied and pale and in pain, looking up languidly in his face as imploring him to heal—him, poor comer-in between souls and mender of bruised bodies, as though he could re-adjust these finer ailments or minister to a mind diseased. But he just whispered, while placing her in the little bed,

"It is in your power to make him well and happy, and yours alone."

He dared not say more then, but he thought she understood.

And most touching of all the incidents of this memorable time was the meek coming of the old man to her bedside, all trembling with love and tenderness, leaning over her with infinitude of devotedness, breathlessly waiting, eyes all lighted up with hope for a look, a word of recognition.

But she put him from her as with aversion.

His bowed sorrow and wounded love spoke in the dignity with which he moved back. He returned to his seat, resigned, sad, and now composed. It was the dangerous apathy of dead sorrow, the torpor of despair.

"It is nothing," said the doctor, aside; "will pass off; symptom of no account."

He looked gratefully from the shadow as he stooped to take up the violin. He was locking it away in the case when Dr. Nichols arose once more to depart. Holding his hand out with farewell cordial sympathy, he said:

"I can be of no further use here. She will be safe in your charge. Her recovery, please God, commences with this; keep her quiet and leave nature to itself. I will look in to-morrow."

He muttered his broken thanks, carrying the friend's hand to his lips. Dr. Nichols hastened from the room, and walking briskly home thought on poor Beethoven's words, "My misfortune gives me double pain, since through it I am misunderstood. For me the recreation of human society, conversation, the interchange of affection, have no place. I must live an exile. Farewell, and do not quite forget me in death. I have deserved it of you, for I have often thought of you in life, and studied how to make you happy: may you be so."

How many of us understand these æolian natures, these souls all attune to excess of feeling? After what eccentric standard would the world rate the scene he had witnessed but now? One of those more subtle episodes off the beaten groove we come upon sometimes, and no more understand than the ancient rites and mysticisms of long-dead peoples and long-buried faiths. We can only go on our way wagging the head, perhaps bestowing vulgar commiseration, knowing as little of the laws which regulate the poetry and music of the soul in its sorrow as of that majestic scheme of creation secret to the Infinite.

The doctor entered his house in a very thoughtful mood.

Sitting by the fire with a favorite volume, he yet could not read that night, looking in the vivid coals where weird faces seemed to glow, and the wondrous blending of youth and age to be illuminated with more significance of meaning than ever. His good wife remarked upon the abstraction of his manner, and asked him,

"What of your little patient, my dear?"

The boy was handing coffee, a rich glow dyed his cheek, and the hand holding the cream-ewer was shaken nervously. He was going to leave the room hurriedly before the doctor could reply properly to the question. This was contrary to the latter's plans. He bade him stay and place some papers in order that were scattered upon his desk; then detailed so much as he considered prudent and most likely to advance the cause at heart.

His wife shrugged her shoulders, seemed to reflect, and said, sententiously,

"You have done well, my dear." (This was better than he had expected; he received reward where it was most sweet, in his wife's approval.) "Yes, you have done well: she shall come to us as soon as sufficiently recovered. Under my care she may be made an amiable and worthy child; intelligent she already is, I am satisfied."

Of course he had not by word or hint connected Arthur in any way; he knew of his own good sense the boy would understand and be wise.

He would not damp his wife's kind sympathy, but in his heart was convinced that, once recovered, so far from being content to settle in their quiet home, the girl would be back at her old wearying life of excitement and glitter. As if it was morally feasible that a girl accustomed for two years or more to dancing at a theatre night after night would settle down to quiet darning, or reading old volumes of Christian magazines!

The outburst he had witnessed (he had not thought it necessary to disclose either the record of one or other of the sad displays) betrayed the strong hold the life had upon her, and he would have staked his professional honor upon the utter impossibility of its eradication.

That her guardian could use restraint he did not for a moment believe. Such policy would change whatever love she entertained to hate. The only course would be to watch over her delicately from the distance—no slight charge where the foot-lights intervene.

He visited his interesting patient daily, then at more extended periods as she improved sufficiently to take short walks, leaning upon her guardian's arm. She progressed rapidly, and it was long before autumn flowers had ceased to bloom that he congratulated her upon return to health.

As he suspected, the aversion to her kind protector was but temporary; her affection increased with recovery.

One day, when the doctor called, he wished to test the old passion; a new *ballet* had recently been produced at her theatre, a spectacle of magnificence. He casually alluded to it, when he detected a slight shudder, a paler hue, and she hastily replied that she had given up thinking of the theatre.

What marvelous light shone on the musician's face! He looked across at his friend, as showing himself satisfied for once and forever.

The passion then had spent itself in that hour of her mad tarantula!

And thus far a good result had come of that wild strain. By his own art, in his own agony, he had conquered.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Blake brought Rose and came up to town for a week, to stay with her brother and his wife, and to see the shops, the autumn novelties, and possible winter fashions.

Arthur knew they were coming, and he was a little sad; for they came from the glorious hills, the quiet lanes, the sweet downland villages, the old woods of Sussex; they came from still watercourses, from silent ways where those herbs grew which the dear dead hand had gathered. He quivered at the very name of their town; he trembled at apprehension of some remark, careless enough, yet that would pain; and he remembered his grandfather's dread of this child, Rose, he was longing yet fearing to see.

Arthur was at some light occupation in the surgery, and there hoped to remain forgotten; he knew they were in the house, and through the wire blind had seen the twenty-seven packages and the black bonnet-box carried into the passage by the cabman. Dr. Nichols was far too thoughtful to send the boy out to help; and he had heard them enter; heard Rose's "Where's Arthur, uncle?" heard the reply, "Busy, little one, in my surgery;" heard them go up stairs to the drawing-room, and Mrs. Nichols come bustling forth to welcome them, all in a flurry, for the good lady had not expected them until evening, and was overtaken in the midst of pastry and preserves. But then, as Mrs. Blake pertinently observed, "One gets another day in by leaving home early." Arthur was at work red-capping phials, deftly white-papering bottles, folding up and tying them round with neat care and nicety. A doctor may have ten boys in his service without one possessing sufficient skill.

Then he heard a step, and saw the surgery door opened a few inches, and some blown tresses, gold against the brown of the door, and sunlight in the dull retreat, and a row of little pink fingers holding it open, the prettiest little nose conceivable, two wicked eyes, and a brow clear and open as the day.

"May I come in, please?"

"Yes, Miss Rose;" and the boy blushed crimson. He could not assume authority with her as with that other.

"It is nice in here, but doesn't smell half so sweet as papa's shop; but that's because you haven't any perfumery. Well, and how are you, Arthur? We have so missed you!"

"Thank you, miss, for kindly saying so; I am much better. I hope Mr. Blake is quite well?"

"Yes, thank you, and he has sent you by me this little present for pocket-money, with his kind remembrance, and hoping you will be happy in London; and I was to be sure and say, that any time if you like to come back to us you can do so." She handed him a sovereign, the gift of his late employer.

"Mr. Blake is very kind, and I thank you, miss; although your uncle is so good to me I scarcely ought to take it."

"Never mind that; put it in your pocket, and —here's some sweets I've brought; and a pair of muffetees I've worked for you, because I thought your hands would be cold; and—I hope it won't make you miserable if I tell you, Arthur —I've been every Saturday afternoon to the church-yard, and have put fresh flowers on the grave where we went the day before you came away. Now don't cry, Arthur, we won't speak of it again; only I thought if I told you directly I came, we could be all the happier afterward, and I shouldn't have it on my mind that I had got to tell you."

He could not help a few scalding tears, but dashed them away, looking up from the misty bottles at the small kind face that seemed pale and thoughtful; but that look of his was beautiful, so full of gratitude and fine appreciation.

"Well, and now what have I to tell you?" seating herself aloft on the one high stool, and gazing with a comical shudder at the leech aquarium, with the remark aside, "Papa's got some of those horrid things!" then looking down and thinking, while the doctor's page quietly proceeded with his work. "I've some canaries, Arthur, beauties! Two sing, and the others don't. Mr. Garland gave them to me, and a splendid cage, and I have them in my play-room at the house."

"Mr. Garland is very kind to you."

"And mamma has a pony-chaise and two ponies. We shall often take nice drives now; it won't be so very much out of the way, as we can drive into Brighton."

"It is a long way from the town;" and, with a choking sensation, the boy brushed his chips and cuttings aside and, begging to be excused, quitted the surgery.

Next day Rose wanted some fruit, and asked permission to go out and buy some; and might Arthur go? They set forth upon their errand, and made the purchase, and were returning, when the meagre, stooping form of the old musician came in sight; with him Amy, almost herself again, and piquant as a young gypsy. She caught sight of her nurse and his companion on the instant. The boy flushed, knew not which way to turn, and, rather vexed, marched on as though having to return immediately to his employment. The old man passed without heeding the boy. Amy gazed earnestly at Rose with that playful impudence young Bohemia displays when critical upon those of the same age higher in the social scale. This led Rose to look back, and she was surprised to find the other similarly engaged. "Well," said Rose, "that girl could not have looked harder if she had seen one of us before."

"It is one of Dr. Nichols's patients, a little girl who has been very ill, and I had to take medicine to the house."

"Well, I shouldn't have thought she would have come to the door; saw you from the window, perhaps."

Arthur considered the whole affair so much more the doctor's property than his own that he accepted the justification, and said no more about it, and Rose skipped on with her bag of fruit, apparently content.

"Is Joseph still on the Council?" asked Dr. Nichols at dinner.

"Next year, brother, Joseph will be an Alderman;" and Mrs. Blake looked majestically at her sister-in-law as if to say, "Wouldn't you like your husband to stand in the way of such honor?" Majesty very much subdued when the doctor observed,

"Well, Margaret, I have never gone into the subject, but *I* could not devote valuable time to parish and borough matters."

"It is a failing of our family, brother, to be born with large ideas. Dear mother always said, you know, I ought to have looked higher than a professional man."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Nichols. "What can be higher than a professional man?"

"You quite startled me, my love," said the doctor, a little nervously. "I thought you'd a bone in your throat."

"Well, a Sir, for instance," replied Mrs. Blake. "It must feel very pleasant to be addressed 'My Lady' this, 'My Lady' that. Now I've an idea such a distinction confers great honor."

"It never struck you, I suppose, Margaret, that it is possible for a lady to confer the honor upon such distinction. Shall I help you to a little more sole?"

"I have no doubt," said the sister-in-law, sweetly, "that Margaret will be Mayoress some day, for it is not to be expected Joseph will rest content as an Alderman."

"Well, I did hear a whisper the town would appreciate Joseph's claim to election; but he is so retiring, you know."

"Soon retire altogether, I suspect," said the doctor, pleasantly; and great harmony prevailed at the doctor's dinner table.

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CHAPTER XL.

THE REV. ROBERT EVELYN'S DIARY.

"*October the Twenty-first.*—Memorable as the day of our removal from Torquay. Don't like removals. Felt leaving the old faces; I believe most were sorry. A Tea, Presentation, and Address, all very satisfactory. The children of the Sunday-schools gave me Kitto's work—had one already, but valued it all the same.

"Have experienced considerable difficulty with Constance; never knew the child so contrary before; didn't want to leave Torquay; would rather not go to Brighton; did I mind her being placed at school? Any where rather than go with me upon my new field of duty. Now this is most extraordinary; the girl must be demented.

"The more extraordinary, remembering *old kindnesses!*

"I was at home at once upon driving to the comfortable house Mr. Garland has been kind enough to take for me; every thing arranged as I could wish. Constance did not like it at all; found fault with every mortal thing; endeavored, I thought, to excite my distaste. Most extraordinary; can not understand it. There is literally not a loop-hole for complaint.

"All the evening Constance very disquieted, as unlike as possible to her usual calm, lady-like manners. I said to her, 'You are feverish, my love!' holding her little hand in mine. She said, 'Yes, papa, and if you do not mind, I will go to bed!' And she went, at 8.45. Most extraordinary!

"I rather anticipated a call from Mr. Garland, but I suppose he was otherwise engaged. What an embarrassing matter it is becoming used to a new name I was about to write—well, what I am requested not to write, nor speak, nor think!

"*October the Twenty-second.*—A note by the morning post: would I call upon Mr. Garland, as he was so very busy? Called. Kind as ever; hoped I should enjoy better health in this more bracing air; hoped my daughter was very well: rather indifferently, I thought, but always kind; hoped our house was to my convenience; hoped Miss Constance was pleased with it, which Miss Constance is not, nor, I think, will ever be. Most extraordinary!

"Mr. Garland described my call as merely one of welcome; he would not trouble me about the duties just yet.

"Went home; Constance in the kitchen, seeing about dinner. 'Been out, papa?' I told her I had made a visit of courtesy to our kind friend. 'Oh!' she said, in an icy sort of fashion quite new to her, and floured the fowl with such vigor that I said, 'Waste not, want not, my dear!' 'Yes, papa,' she said, with a curious manner I did not quite like. I fancy the change of air is not agreeing with my invariably good little girl.

"After dinner I placed my books in position in their new quarters; alteration for the better so far as the room is concerned. Our friend is a marvelously thoughtful man; I am sure the relaxing climate of South Devon would have totally prostrated me had I remained much longer. 'I think it very likely,' said I to Constance, upon her peeping in to see how I was progressing, 'that Mr. Garland is coming to tea.' 'Indeed, papa!' And she helped me a little while with my books and papers, and then ran down stairs to her housekeeping.

"I was particularly struck by the extreme neatness and order in the house of our friend, although it is not furnished with any thing like the luxury of this. I ventured, when he was alluding to this house, to say, 'You have been too liberal in providing for our comfort;' whereat, with a pleasant smile, he replied, 'You need a more comfortable home than I, that your daughter may be happy.' And she isn't. Most extraordinary!

"I fancy if ever girl was brought up well, was taught contentment with station, gratitude to Providence, thankfulness to kind friends, dutiful obedience, and modest self-possession, that girl is my daughter; and yet, with all my careful rearing, she appears to be developing an opinionativeness which is eminently grievous to a father in holy orders.

"Upon ringing for Constance to come and sort my manuscript sermons, I was informed by our maid that Miss Evelyn had gone out. This did not so much matter. I thought she had probably gone to look at our new church; but the climax of her strange freak was realized when she did not come in to tea. I felt annoyed, because, had Mr. Garland looked in, I should have liked her to preside. But, as it fortunately happened, he did not.

"Constance came in at half past eight; had been for a walk, looking at the shops. I kissed her, and said she was a naughty girl to run away thus.

"Sat up rather late, looking through the best of my sermons for future use when not feeling very well.

"Caught Constance in tears over her work. Whatever has come to the girl?

"*October the Twenty-third.*—After breakfast this morning I said, 'If you will put your hat on, my dear, we will call and pay our respects to Mr. Garland.' But there was so much to do in the house; and her morning dress was shabby, she must see about a new one; and she had letters to write to her friends in Torquay, which must go out by the 4.15 post; therefore would I please excuse her? I did so, because unable by any possibility to turn her. I felt vexed, because, I admit it, I am proud of my darling. She is so beautiful, that wherever we call her presence is the most satisfactory note of introduction. I have found that out; but I have never known her to be so disagreeable as at the present time in this matter of Brighton. I have no patience with such extraordinary crotchets.

"Called and found Mr. Garland closeted with some poor working-man, who passed me with bowed head but the most happy expression of countenance I ever witnessed. I was admitted at once, and we went to business. Our parish seems bounded by the Downs, the sea, Rotting-dean, and Shoreham. 'I recognize no appointed limits for the doing of good or distribution of charity, my dear friend,' was the introduction to this tremendous area. Most extraordinary! I confess I am more in favor of the streets immediately around the church, and I do not consider it orthodox to overstep the line of our parish. It is apt to give offense to one's spiritual neighbors; besides, I think the clerical rolling stone gathers no moss. Of course I did not make this admission to our good friend, whom I will join heart and soul in his great and broad system of charity; but such are my principles. Mr. Garland already has an able coadjutor in Spencer Webb, a capital fellow; only one thing against him—he's a Cambridge man. Mr. Garland was very kind in his inquiries concerning Constance. How queer he must think it I don't bring the child! I made all the excuses possible, but he is not like any one else; he would see through a brick wall.

"Later, Webb and I called upon some of the people. Met my new Bishop on the King's Road—received my introduction with delightful courtesy.

"Altogether I am becoming accustomed to the exchanged sphere, and believe I shall feel very comfortable. Mr. Garland has an enormous congregation, chiefly dons.

"Was much struck, when upon the road today, by a most haughty-looking woman. I was shocked by the imperious cast of feature, and thought its wearer needed reminding that the most disdainful of sovereigns must inevitably become as the dust of Egypt. Webb told me it was Lady Helen Darrell, a member of Mr. Garland's church, therefore I think it more than probable she has been already reminded of that great truth.

"Mr. Garland looked in after tea. Upon hearing the knock my child blushed, then turned very white, and, aware of her intention, I stood by the door to prevent her escape, so Miss Willful was trapped. But now ensued a most extraordinary circumstance. Instead of following the servant and entering our parlor, where every thing was cozy and in preparation, he just stepped into the room I use as a library. Of course I at once went and remonstrated, begging he would take us as we were, excuse homeliness, and so on. 'I am always careful about intruding upon family privacy, Evelyn. I hold those rooms to be sacred habitually occupied by the members of a family, and upon no account to be trespassed upon by strangers.' Most considerate, I'm sure, but, in the interim, my bird had flown, and I can not help fancying he did it purposely. All this is very extraordinary!

"Sent up for Constance. Would I pardon her not coming down, as she had a severe headache? 'Pray do not ask it,' said our friend; 'the change to this Brighton air often takes an unpleasant effect at first. I merely called to explain my dissection of districts, that yourself and Mr. Webb may equally divide the visiting.' He took from his pocket a complete chart of streets in the poor and middle-class quarters, and I found my ground marked red, and Webb's blue. 'By this guide you will avoid walking in each other's foot-prints, an inadvertence the poor resent. Make no formality of the work; do not enter if the people are engaged; interchange a greeting and withdraw, calling at a more opportune season; tact and delicacy in this matter are half the battle. Do not press literature. If they seem disposed to welcome it, introduce the best we can provide; you will find one of the rooms in my house well stored. I shall feel glad if you will take, at discretion, whatever suits your purpose. And my housekeeper will receive the addresses of all to whom you desire wine, jelly, soup, beef tea, broth, fruit, or plainer food dispatched. You will favor my housekeeper at Hawkingdean with instructions as to flannel, blankets, hose, calico, or other clothing, that good lady taking supervision of this department. I shall place at your disposal a check for ten pounds monthly, the sum Mr. Webb has been kindly disbursing for me. This will not, of course, relieve the most pressing cases of privation; these you will set down to my account.'

"This is, as closely as I can remember, the substance of Mr. Garland's pithy directions; and if he is not a good man, and one exempt from all temptation of the world, the flesh, and the devil, then my name is not Robert Evelyn.

"Ah! Constance at the piano; that is the plaintive strain we used to have at Torquay, but it seems long since I heard it. I do believe not since the closing of those pleasant evenings at Eagle Hall. Even Constance, dear child, felt the loss of those kind friends most deeply.

"*October the Twenty-fourth.*—My poor wife's birthday. She never did like my keeping a diary, and would say that God alone needed to treasure in remembrance the good or ill of men's making, and that we should only preserve our daily memory of Him.

"Yet I would not let such deeds as Westley Garland's go unchronicled; rather write in golden letters the veriest words and acts of that good man.

"It will make it excessively unpleasant for me in my relation with Mr. Garland if Constance maintains this evident aversion, which is the most mysterious of all my experiences. After prayers last evening, when the servant had retired, I reasoned with my child, and very kindly, but all I could get out of her was this, 'It is nothing, dear papa; please not to take any notice of it.'

"To-day I prepared my first sermon for preaching in Brighton. I am to deliver it at evening service on Sunday next. I hope that proud woman won't sit directly opposite, transfixing me with her defiant stare. I always feel a degree uncomfortable until I become used to a pulpit and the people.

"My servant with a card. A gentleman would like a word or two with me. Certainly. I pin the card here for future reference:

"*Mr. Noel Barnard,*

"Regina Cottage."

CHAPTER XLI.

A BEAUTY QUEST.

Few men in Society were more popular than Lord Frank Ellerby: a wit, refined, and with great taste, he was excellent company, and in much request. Lord Ellerby's house in Brighton was a complete art collection, where the rare and the beautiful blended in delicate rivalry. He had a passionate admiration for the beautiful;

and even as some statue will soothe like a song, some face like the cadence of rare music, this connoisseur of the exquisite had been spell-bound before a picture. It was at the Royal Academy. A warm afternoon, a crowd, for it was one of the closing days of the exhibition. Lord Ellerby had but recently returned from Switzerland, and ventured the fatigue and braved the crush in the interests of art. He had strolled through the galleries, not overimpressed; had taken every thing as coolly as possible and with undeviating good humor, and was about leaving, when his attention was caught by a face upon the canvas so uncommon and so perfect by all the laws of loveliness that he brought his weary saunter to a stand-still, reveling in a fairer vision than he had seen in all his travels.

"It's the artist, ma. Look how he's admiring it!" Thus inferred a spectral maiden.

"Don't see any thing in the picture, my child; extravagantly unreal. Come along; there's a lovely Punch and Toby!"

On another side—

"Striking face that, Celeste?"

"Oh, do you think so? Is it clematis or jasmine? A pretty frame-work; don't see much in the face. Mrs. Macdonald, what do *you* think of the face?"

"Wouldn't hang it in my nursery. What's the next? Potiphar's wife. That's a sweet study. Let's sit down."

The absorbed critic also sat down, but the people's talk seemed sacrilege.

He turned to the catalogue and read,

"104. FLORA. PORTRAIT OF THE DAUGHTER OF J. ARTHUR ANDERSON, ESQ. MILLETT."

Yes, that was the name. Of course he was no wiser, but he felt a strange gladness it was not the daughter of some high and exalted personage. Yet Mr. J. Arthur Anderson might be as unapproachable.

One other matter gave him gratification—there was no red star upon the frame denoting it SOLD. He would return in the morning when the place was quiet; he would be first, and view the picture at his leisure, when the gallery was flooded with cool morning light; he would view it from a distance; he would examine it close, with reverent attention; read it, line by line, like some wondrous poem, when there were none near to comment upon his actions.

Awkwardly, most awkwardly, he had trodden upon an old gentleman's toes. The old gentleman swore. He apologized, and walked over to Potiphar's wife. He saw the old fellow in front of the picture long afterward, and experienced a jealous pang, as though he had an interest in the daughter of J. Arthur Anderson already.

He quitted the Academy, resolving to return in the morning.

He leaned back in his carriage with closed eyes, musing upon the face.

"Flora!" he repeated to himself; and if it was the girl's name, it did not take his fancy.

Long before reaching his house near Regent's Park he had resolved to purchase the picture on the morrow. The more he recalled that pensive face, the more he loved it; and "To-morrow," he repeated softly to himself, as though afraid the very wind might forestall his purpose.

At home he walked about his rooms, set the gas and tapers burning, fancied he saw it upon the walls or carefully veiled upon an easel. He would hang it here in his study; no, there in the drawing-room. Nonsense! it should not hang at all; the sun would fade the matchless bloom upon the cheek, the air would injure its delicacy, dust or smoke would sully the fair purity. It should be in his bed-chamber, upon a dainty rest of fine Swiss carving—daily his morning welcome—and tapers should burn before it while he passed with it into dream-world.

They had barely opened the doors at the Academy before Lord Ellerby arrived. The officials imagined him a student. He passed them with a civil "Good-morning," feeling a little ashamed of this infatuation; yet it was as strong upon him as on the preceding day.

He made for the gallery. Room VII.—Somebody there! And before his picture!

He felt wicked, for he recognized the ferocious old gentleman whose corns he had assaulted.

He had probably been there some time, and he would probably be more polite in the morning than in the evening, for when he saw his lordship making for the picture he kindly bustled away. His lordship was grateful, and thought better of the old gentleman. A philanthropist, no doubt; one living unselfishly for the good of others. He was thinking thus, when the price clerk came and stuck a red star upon the frame of his picture.

"Not sold?" he gasped.

"To the gentleman who was here five minutes ago, Sir."

He staggered back, and hid the face from his eyes, for it burned with regretful pain.

To fancy it the property of that old Goth! Some Manchester millionaire, no doubt, with the art tastes of an auctioneer. To imagine it upon the wall of some wildly vulgar drawing-room, where the entire arrangement was an outrage, in a hideously big red-bricked mansion! It was desecration!

Would he be open to consider an increased offer? Just the man, no doubt. He would discover his name and address, would treat with him, would open golden negotiations forthwith; the Vandal should not escape him.

One look—fond, but not the last—and away to the price clerk. He was politely allowed to inspect the form. The price clerk was interested. His lordship explained the circumstances. The price clerk smiled kindly. His lordship noted down the name and address. The price clerk looked grave. His lordship caught the infection, and waited.

"I'm afraid you'll find Mr. Grannett a hard one to deal with, Sir; he looks a close-fisted one."

"I—am—sure of it," replied his lordship, collectedly.

"I remember last season he bought a painting, and one of the frame corners was chipped: the trouble he gave us about that piece of business nobody knows."

"I am surprised the portrait is for sale at all. Who is J. Arthur Anderson?"

"A gentleman at Clapton; the young lady is his only child."

"You know them?"

"Not at all; I heard Mr. Millett speaking of them."

"A long sum was paid him, I doubt not, for painting it. It is exquisitely done."

"A long sum *was* paid, Sir, but by Mr. Millett himself. He was struck by the young lady's beauty, I heard him say, and lost no time in securing it for his canvas."

"That seems to me a new way of working art. Mr. Anderson must be a curious person."

"Something of a miser, I have heard; very wealthy."

All this had altered matters. If he could but interview Mr. Grannett, he might buy the picture; but however that would end, to form the acquaintance of Mr. Anderson and his lovely daughter would be to attain the summit of his hopes at once.

"As a great favor, would you give me Mr. Anderson's address?"

"I do not know it, Sir. Mr. Millett might perhaps give it you; he resides at Clapton."

Thanking his civil informant, Lord Ellerby departed—Claptonward. He had never been there before; he would improve his knowledge of London at once. He did not know where it was, but instructed his man to find it, and doubted not he would do so.

He did, after what seemed hours' riding. Lord Ellerby wondered what time next day Clapton folks could arrive home after visiting St. James's Theatre. He referred to his note-book:

"*Jeremiah Grannett, Malachite House, Oak Grove, Clapton.*"

To calculate moderately, perhaps his man was double the time finding Oak Grove that he had been finding Clapton. Had his lordship been a foreign ambassador, anxious to secure an impression of London out in that direction, nothing could have been finer, but as it was, he grew somewhat irritable. The Spartan composure upon which he prided himself, under which he thought to endure any thing unmoved from hard words to hailstones, and which his friends called his confounded coolness, and his enemies his diabolic self-possession—this glorious quality which enabled a man, as he said, to light his cigar at that burning affair near Naples; quietly to undress when the balloon was descending swiftly toward the sea; easily and pleasantly to finish an article during a railway accident; calmly to brush one's teeth before doing any thing else when aroused, in the dead of night, by the cry that the stairs were on fire; to wind up one's watch while the ship was sinking—this enviable, imperturbable repose was ruffled altogether by his beauty chase.

When Oak Grove was found, Malachite House seemed likely to hold out the same trouble. A butcher's boy did—no, he did not know Malachite House, stared stupidly, and vanished. A governess in black, with two red-haired children, did—no, she did not know Malachite House, looked frightened, and walked on swiftly, evidently possessed with the idea that the fell design was theft of the saffron-locked cherubs. A draper's assistant, with a yard-stick he half ashamedly wielded as a walking-cane, and an emptied warehouse on his back—no, *he* did not know Malachite House, "didn't know the name at all." Next they hailed a brewer's dray; its ponderous progress was brought to a stand. Could the driver tell them where Malachite House was? That man swore at them; he didn't know no Malachites, and thought they'd had a drop too much. A policeman did—no, the name was strange to him, he was fresh on that beat; then, thinking they were making fun of him, walked on indignantly. A nursemaid with an infant thought they were making advances, frowned, and hurried on in the rear of the policeman. A lady—ancient study—ringlets, dog, knitting-pins, and reticule; no, she did not know Malachite House, but would help them to search for it with very great pleasure. They looked at one another, master and man. Lord Ellerby, retreating to shelter of his carriage, allowed his lackey to continue the quest at leisure; his lordship had, apparently, taken up his abode in that grove.

Somebody else came in view, either a prize-fighter or an idiot. Would John interrogate, he wondered. Yes! And this splendid fellow *did* know Malachite House. John came to his master with a face quite radiant, and mounting, drove on for the house.

Malachite at last! And old Grannett doing something in the garden.

Lord Ellerby walked up to him.

"Ah! Good-morning! Just turning out the slugs?"

This in dulcet tones, with a fascinating smile.

"You remember me, Mr. Grannett?"

"Can't say I do. Who are you, and what do you want? Parish doctor, I suppose!" with a sneer.

"I have not the privilege of being that person. But I—I had the honor of treading upon your toes yesterday."

"The devil you did, Sir! You were not the only one; they were at it all day. All London and the provinces were at that game yesterday, because it was hotter than usual. What have you come about?"

"A picture you bought. You forestalled me."

"Thought so," rubbing his hands gleefully, and cackling like a dragon.

"Funny, isn't it?" said his lordship, with sardonic effect; whereon the other stuck his spade sharply into the mould.

"My time is precious, Sir; state your business, sharp!"

"I'm obliged to you, but my medical attendant expressly forbids excitement. A word with you, leisurely; perhaps— A breakfast-room?" pointing to a shady retreat, glowing with chintz.

He hobbled off in that direction, fuming.

"Charmingly laid out, Sir, your garden."

He turned sharply: "It 'll be a shilling when it's open to the public;" and they stepped into the breakfast parlor, very prettily furnished, pale green and gold; beautiful heads, female studies chiefly, upon the delicate paper.

The old gentleman gruffly motioned to a chair, and his lordship began business in earnest.

"I want that picture removed to my house instead of yours, Mr. Grannett. What will satisfy you?"

They eyed each other keenly. Mr. Grannett twitched off an antimacassar, made a ball, and took aim at a fly upon the nose of a classical masterpiece.

"Glad when winter comes to get rid of those brutes. The picture—hum—well, double what I gave at the Academy."

The visitor did not appear to exhibit any surprise; not because the exorbitant demand did not startle, but because he made it a point to avoid surprise. Mr. Grannett smiled grimly as he took out his check-book.

"Agreed. Oblige me with pen and ink."

He did so—silently. And Lord Ellerby wrote in compliance with the extravagant demand. He held it between finger and thumb as if it would bite.

"You're the queerest customer I've had dealings with yet; and I made my money as a broker."

"Thank you," responded his lordship, with icy languor, for the old one was doubly objectionable on that account.

"You must—excuse me. Do you take a strong interest in the girl to give that amount for her picture?"

"I do; I admit it. Will you tell me where they live?"

It was useless standing upon delicacy with a man like that.

"I can; and will *give* you the picture upon one condition."

It was now Lord Ellerby's turn to be astonished.

"*That you marry her!*"

Composure came to his aid. "I shall be delighted," he said, and he meant it.

"Anderson, you must know, is a miser, a man of no principle, a thorough old scamp; in short, my brother-in-law!"

"Sorry to hear of the relationship," said his lordship.

"An old maiden aunt left Flora thirty thousand pounds, to pass from her use and possession the day she is married—"

"When, I suppose, the money passes into your hands?"

"Into mine."

"Your proposal is very disinterested."

This pleasant old man was improving rapidly in his lordship's estimation. He evidently stood as little upon delicacy as possible.

"I accept the picture." His lordship rose, taking back the check. "Give me the address. If I am fortunate enough to win the young lady's love, she will never know the loss of her thirty thousand pounds."

He fumbled at an untidy, dirty desk, and scribbled it down.

"And now your written instructions about the picture, or they will not deliver it."

"To be forfeited if you never marry Flora Anderson."

His lordship signed to that effect, and took his departure, never more rejoiced to quit a dwelling. Be Anderson what he might, he would not be as objectionable in his eyes as this old man.

"Where to, Sir?"

He looked at the address.

"Hackney Gravel-Pits."

"Beg pardon, Sir?" The man touched his hat.

Lord Ellerby gave him the paper. Another case of asking. They might as well have been in the interior of Africa. Better! The general public would have been more enlightened.

They fortunately came upon a lady who knew the Gravel-Pits and every corner public-house between.

"*Arthur Anderson, Esq., The Willows, Hackney Gravel-Pits.*"

"What business have men with lovely daughters to live in gravel-pits? Intended for conies and such creatures—disgusting!" muttered his lordship.

They discovered "The Willows" at three minutes past five, the wind in the northeast.

"Lively situation!" and with a dubious countenance Frank Lord Ellerby stood by the gate. He glanced upward, and saw a vision at a window—a head like to the head of Molière's "L'Hypocondriaque."

He walked up the garden path—stones, not a flower any where, oyster shells, hardware grotto ornaments. A big slice of ground, but no produce, not even a weed.

"Unhappy Anderson, Esquire! Let us hope thou art not so cheerless within."

Thus ruminating he rang a bell, which pleasantly trifled with the air some ten minutes; for that bell—truly an alarm that might have been heard in Westminster Abbey, traffic permitting—was suspended in the yard rearward.

No response.

Calmly, nay, pleasantly, his lordship waited, for he would not that the sun should go down upon his impatience. Go down it would, if he had to wait much longer.

It was not a bell leaving any doubt about its being heard; a truly Shakspearean dreadful bell, that rang all over the pits and warrens.

He would not ring again; the clatter frightened him. The mare might bolt, or a fire-engine come dashing up. A hundred things might happen. He would not ring again; he would bivouac. He unfolded a newspaper, spread it on the top steps, sat upon the money markets, and leaned his back against the miser's door. Disturbed by a cracked voice above, he leisurely raised his eyes to the altitude of a bed-chamber.

"Go away; we've nothing to give you—not a farthing or a scrap in the house. There's a dog at the back."

And a bell, he thought. He was taken for a mendicant; it was of no consequence, but the fact remained. The Molière head was withdrawn, and the window dropped like a portcullis.

He looked sweetly up and prepared for taking the fort. Baying of a blood-hound was heard from the rear, and he experienced the "Dred" sensation of the transpontine theatre.

But at this thrilling moment there was great rattling of bolts and bars and chains, and the door opened.

Anderson, Esquire, stood within, in his night-cap, a napkin tucked under his chin, a spoon in one hand, a gun in the other.

"How do you do?" asked his lordship, cheerily. "Poorly, I fear," commiseratingly. "Mr. Anderson, I believe?" re-assuringly.

And then this pleasant papa of the future spoke, with groan accompaniment,

"What do you require? Speak, or I will not answer for the consequences."

"I have called upon a little private business, if you—"

"State it where you are, Sir; I admit no strangers."

"If you wish it. I am desirous of investing some money to the best advantage. I dared to think you would advise me; your experience is well and deservedly known."

The night-cap was knocked off, the hands clutched the dressing-gown; he shuffled a step or two nearer.

"It hasn't done me much service; I'm wretchedly poor. Walk in."

Suddenly he turned—"Is that your shay?"

"If you like, facetiously, to call it so, it is."

"Horse your own?"

"Very much so—in exchange for a hundred guineas."

His metallic old eyes glittered.

"Man your own?"

"In my employ."

"Just tell him to see the brute don't nibble the laurels next door. I can't pay any damages of that sort."

His lordship gave the necessary instructions, and then followed Mr. J. Arthur Anderson into the house.

He found a spacious hall, with nothing in it. A spacious back-room, no carpet, wooden chairs, and a deal table. This was the tent wherein the patriarch dwelt. Not oppressive with luxury. It presented economy under a restrictive aspect.

"Be seated."

His lordship tried one of the wooden chairs.

"I have a thousand pounds, Mr. Anderson, for investment. I like to drop a thousand each year into something. I have the honor to be interested in every thing, I think, from penny steamboats to Petersburg photographs, not to mention gas companies, foreign loans, and railways."

"Your name is Cook?"

"Unfortunately no. I am not that great man, nor connected. You simply have the pleasure of beholding Frank Ellerby."

"Lord Ellerby?"

"Yes, men are good enough even to use that handle. To my friends I am Ellerby—Ellerby to you, if agreeable. Can you oblige me with a glass of water?"

Lord Ellerby wanted to see this daughter, and for that would endure his aversion—the tasteless fluid.

"With pleasure. I am glad you drink water; we can not afford any thing else."

"Hard times!" and his lordship sighed sympathetically, although he believed the old man possessed more wealth than himself.

He walked nimbly to the door. It was astonishing to see the change for the better in his malady; and he screamed up stairs,

"Flora! Flora! A glass of water directly—see the tap isn't left running!" Then to his visitor, "Between 'em, they waste more than their heads are worth."

His lordship was inspecting, out of the window, the back garden, with its wilderness of old tiles and bricks (Mr. Anderson brought one home in his pocket every time he went out, and did his own repairs), at the dog-kennel without a roof, and the dog which seemed couchant to prevent his bones being seen; at a corner heap of old gallipots, and a water-butt falling to pieces. This and a magnificent stretch of garden ground apportioned as a chicken walk where one cadaverous fowl was supreme autocrat of the bare domain. He was looking out of window at the back garden, and he knew that she had entered.

He had heard the gentle footfall and the low-breathed sigh. He would prolong the thrill of anticipation no longer; he turned to realize his beautiful vision, and—

Confronted the most hideous maiden that was surely ever permitted to go forth unattended.

Meagre as the dog, wizen-visaged, angular as Euclid, ghastly-complexioned, grisly-locked, and in black silk worn to an absolute bronze.

He wondered what Millett had thought of this pre-Raphaelite saint of the Gravel-Pits.

She handed him the water in a tin mug, the old man grumbling,

"Where's our glass?"

"Brother dear," responded the spinster, "it is broken. I would have told you before but for your illness."

An imprecation escaped the old man.

"The second this year. Well, you'll have no more."

The lady of ripened charms looked resigned, and took the goblet from the visitor's outstretched hand. His face was averted, for he could not look upon this study.

"Where's Flora?" His lordship's heart bounded.

"Tacking patches on your stockings, brother; they're too far gone to darn."

"Well, we'll buy no more this year. It's ruinous. Tell Flora to come here."

The maiden retired. His lordship began to think the Gravel-Pit family a queer lot. But only till Flora came; then he forgot all.

Such matchless loveliness he had never seen. How ever it came of such parentage seemed the mystery, and remained so until one day the old man produced a miniature of his dead wife: there were seen the features, and the Titian shade of hair, and the lovely dove-like eyes. A beautiful woman; and well he had loved her, for his voice lowered when he spoke of his lost wife, and his thin hand was shaking as he took back the picture.

Lord Ellerby was not surprised that Millett had been glad to paint the face; it was worthy his brush. Do not think it was an ideal saintly dream, or the splendid tenderness we associate with the Madonna's face; it was far too human: wickedly mirthful as the faces of those loving little Italians who beset the opera doors in Naples. He was very fond of those saint heads—in pictures; in life, give him wickedness.

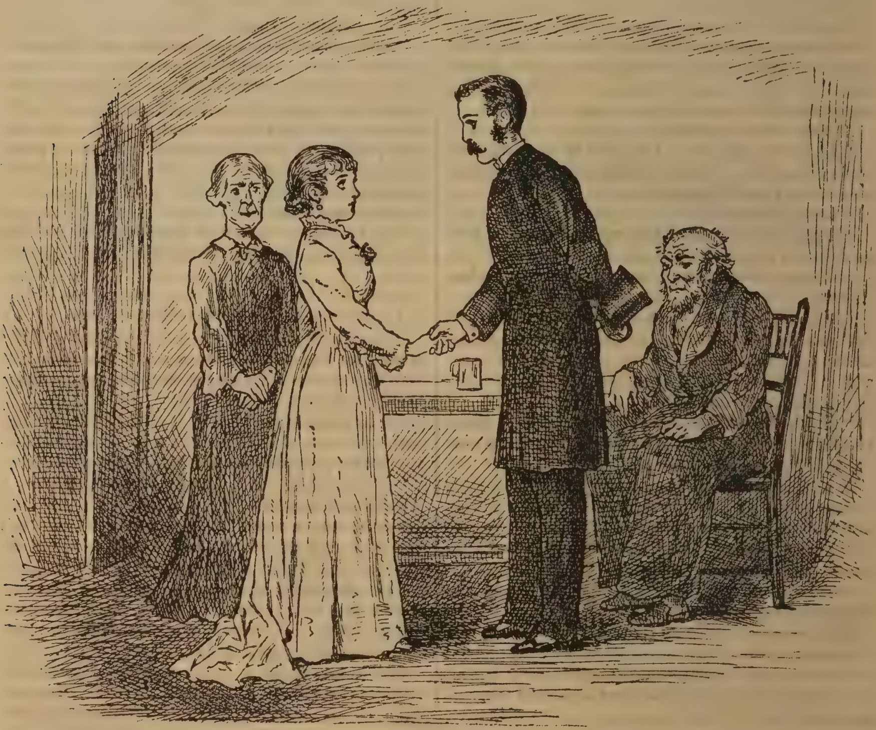
"My daughter, Sir. Flora love, Lord Ellerby."

He shook hands with Flora. He did not tell him this was a beauty quest; that this was the aim and end of his journey. And how did he feel concerning Flora, now face to face with his ideal? Candidly, she surpassed all he had imagined, and it was beauty that would increase—mature with the years. He was satisfied, was more than compensated.

Later, he heard it was a dream of the old man's heart to make this girl, his pride, wealthy after he was gone; and for her sake did Lord Ellerby forgive him his penurious habits. He loved her, after a curious fashion, even before his gold, ay, and before his life. Else, when she stood but as high as their deal table, and a fire broke out above, would he have dashed so madly into her blazing red-hot bedroom, and torn her from the little couch at risk of life and limb?

Lord Ellerby learned before he had done with him, and robbed him of his pretty flower, to respect and feel for the solitary man left alone with his crotchets in the miserable large waste of house and waste of world, where there seemed no gladness and no comfort. And he respected him doubly for this, that when the time came for asking of him his treasure, he did not, as the bold suitor dreaded, refuse, but left it in her own wise hands. And he who had won the love then won the choice.

But Frank Lord Ellerby had no pity for the lonely old man, none; he took her away, as proud of his bride as was ever English noble, and as worthy of her. And once his own, he had the gratification of discovering that beauty, which, he was ashamed to say, had been his only quest, was the least of those graces which go to the adornment of wifehood. Lady Ellerby indeed was possessed of innate refinement that shed lustre even upon her new name and title, and the charm of intellect and quick appreciation of the beautiful rendered her a fitting companion in every respect for the gifted young peer. At last his creed and his faith had taken shape, and he was the proud possessor of a realized ideal in every particular. And if for this alone his name is well chronicled, such examples being conspicuous by their rarity.



"MY DAUGHTER, SIR. FLORA LOVE, LORD ELLERBY."

Sometimes he would remember that the dear are human, and that the doubly dear are doubly human, and that beauty is but a shadow; but then, with that cheerful philosophy, his strongest point, he would say to himself, "And I believe in shadows; the world would be a bare, blank, fierce hot wall without;" and would think his beauty quest at least had the moral of Bacon's words—"That is the best part of beauty which a picture can not express." Yet the picture was passing fair, as she would sit between him and the open window, looking upon the sea and the glorious autumn sunsets of Brighton; between him and the flowers; standing forth from the sky with its ruby and rose, from the sea with its flushed sheen of green and of gold; a face small, classic, profiled like the most exquisite cameo graven or carved of Italian stone; a form slight, symmetrically made; a sculpture all sweeps and curves and lines of grace in rhythm one with another; a fair flower-wife, delicate, gentle, and good, and with a soul—this represented much to Frank Ellerby. "I meet so many soulless people," he would say, "especially in England. I attribute it to absence of scenery and to a lack of the poetical." One day he was speaking of this to Flora, and he said,

"If ever I saw soul written upon a man's face, I saw it to-day. I could not help asking who he was, and I was informed the Rev. Westley Garland. I am sorry to say I never went to church very much before my Flora directed my steps thither, but I certainly think we ought to settle down somewhere. I am disposed to like St. Michael's, but we will go and hear this famous preacher, and if we are impressed as much as are others of his hearers, we can not do better than take a pew at his church, supposing one is to be obtained. By-the-way, my love, you must read his new book. I read it in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"In Paris, where a translation was published simultaneously. The work is popular there, as it should be, extolling one of their celebrities. I see there is a notice of the book in the *Buckingham.*"

"Read it, dear; I should like to hear what your favorite journal says about it."

Lord Ellerby read aloud from the journal quoted:

"The Rev. Westley Garland has again astonished the world by another eccentric production, in which the flowers of a gorgeous rhetoric seem scattered broadcast, as usual; but we think a deeper meaning underlies this romantic study from a life of the last century—that it is wise to preserve a brave heart, come honor or dishonor, and patiently to work on, wait on, even in the very face of poverty, calumny, and trouble. The reverend gentleman has added one more judicious selection from great lives in illustration of those noble truths it is his invariable custom to impress upon the reader; and while we dissent from the poetical rhapsodies into which he is often betrayed, this is rather an error of sensitiveness than of taste, and we can not but commend the general elegance of the composition. As a dainty reflex of the wonderful changes in a remarkable career the work is worthy of attentive perusal, and we thank the author for this artistic little drama of seasons. But while doing so, our readers will readily understand that we do not indorse all the sentiments either of the Rev. Westley Garland or of the Viscount de Châteaubriand, whose questionable policy and inconsistency of action were at one period the scandal of Europe."

Lord Ellerby smiled.

"The *Buckingham* will have its rap, even in a review. Well, I think this cleric may feel pretty satisfied; it is a very fair notice indeed. The next thing is to send for the book."

His lordship, however, remembered this was to be obtained only of the author, and he decided to call himself for three copies. It was no great distance to the Minister's town residence, and his lordship elected to walk. Upon the way he met the Earl of Comdarlington, who at once offered to introduce him to the lion.

"So glad to have met you, as the chances are you would only have seen Webb, who transacts this literary business for Mr. Garland. You ought to know the Minister; quite a man after your own heart, I believe—a scholar, a poet, and a gentleman."

Lord Ellerby bowed with a pleasant smile.

"You compliment me, my lord; but I don't mind it from you, because I am satisfied it is sincere."

At which Lord Comdarlington bowed with a pleasant smile; and having thus amicably enchanted each other, nobility presented quite a radiant pair of faces while mounting the upward road leading to the Minister's house.

Not one of the most imposing of roads, not high-rented houses, but eminently select.

The earl presented his card. Was Mr. Garland at home to visitors?

Mr. Garland was at home to visitors, but at that moment engaged. Would his lordship step to the drawing-room?

A somewhat gloomy room. He had taken this house furnished; the trappings had seen the best of their days, the gilding was tarnished, the paint discolored, but upon the table were choice volumes, works not discoverable in the ordinary drawing-room.

"An *édition de luxe* here!" The critical eye had detected the treasure in a moment.

"What is it?" asked the earl, indifferently. His tastes did not lie in the direction.

"*Les Arts Somptuaires.* Bound by Rivière, too. And I declare here is Didot's *Paul et Virginie* and *La Pucelle.* Look at this, my lord."

"No, thanks; don't care much for those unique specimens."

"And here's a Capé, and Bozerain—*Le Moyen Age et la Renaissance;* and here is Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses.* Have not seen the old friend for an age. And here's a grand affair—*Les Emaux de Petitot, du Musée Impérial du Louvre.*"

"Mr. Garland will see you, Sir."

They followed the servant. At the foot of the stairs they were passed by a poor widow woman coming from an audience with the Minister, and for whom these lords had been kept waiting until she had quite closed her pathetic interview. The earl shrugged his shoulders; he did not half like this disregard of caste, but he knew one might as well try to convert a statue of bronze to any slighting of the poor or the unfortunate.

He was gravely writing, but upon entrance of the visitors, wiped the pen with scrupulous care, laid it alongside others upon the stand, and, rising, bowed a little distantly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Garland. Hope you are well, Sir. Allow me to introduce my friend Lord Ellerby."

The gentleman bowed.

"Lady Ellerby is very anxious to read your *Triumph of Seasons.* My friend here purposed calling for some copies, ran upon myself; disclosed the mission precipitating him at a speed quite out of the common—a lazy dog in the ordinary way, Mr. Garland—and presuming upon very brief acquaintance, I undertook the pleasure of an introduction."

"Be seated, Sir."

The Minister courteously motioned; there was no necessity for further ceremony.

"I think you are not looking very well, Mr. Garland."

"I have lost my proper rest of late."

"You apply yourself too closely to your studies in the still hours."

"These have been closer studies than usual—by the sick-bed."

"You have been acting the Good Samaritan again."

"A poor widow's son and only stay has been near to his death, and their sole resources have thus been brought to a stand-still. Too poor to pay one of the respectable and presumably skilled practitioners, she—"

"Sent for the parish doctor, of course!"

"No, my lord, she came for me." The dry manner in which this was said was eminently discomforting, yet with so gentle an expression no one could have replied thereto. "Somehow the utterly destitute and unutterably wretched have confidence in what we Gospel ministers denominate Prayer, and while her son lay dying this poor woman thought of myself—thought my imperfect utterance was of more likely efficacy than her own."

"Quite right!" cried the earl, approvingly.

"Not so, my lord. I very quickly undeceived the heart-broken and timid mother."

"And you engaged in prayer for her. Very good of you, very!"

"No; I engaged in prayer with her."

The earl tapped a silver snuff-box. Lord Ellerby looked with curiosity upon the speaker. He could not reconcile it with *Les Arts Somptuaires* and the rest. The earl trifled with an elegant China silk handkerchief, as much as to say, "You mustn't be surprised at any thing from our talented but eccentric preacher."

"Well, I hope the patient thus kindly watched over is recovering," said Lord Ellerby, so feelingly that the reserved Minister thought well of him therefrom; and to himself, "I must get this Garland to come and see us. He's a fine fellow; Flora will be charmed."

CHAPTER XLII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE "SEVEN TUNS."

The entertaining study of Natural History is successful in so far as it rivets attention and courts inquiry.

Creatures whose characteristics verge on the irregular repay at once the philanthropist and the historian.

The caravan of monkeys supports the menagerie, and the odd people of our acquaintance kindly sustain the interest of the tea tables.

When the cynic of antiquity went searching for an honest man, he knew himself to be a humbug of the first water, yet was he accounted wise. Our modern cynics think themselves to be wise, while every body knows them to be fools. Between which we have the genus Eccentrics, with their pleasant commingling of foolery and wisdom.

The eccentric is an institution tolerated, criticised, admired, or feared, as the case may be.

There is the brief and brusque eccentric, and the eccentric always ailing, and the exquisite and perfumed eccentric, and the eccentric whose charm consists in excess of information—they are all necessary to the tableaux of Society.

Eccentrics are dividable by species, the generic worth being rated by the bank-book.

The wealthy eccentric is an Art Patron of distinguished tastes.

The middle-class eccentric is a Peculiar Person not quite right.

The poor eccentric is a person to be avoided—he sometimes wants to borrow; he is sure to be unpleasant.

Of the First Division, the Man in the Lords takes pre-eminence: his idiosyncrasy proceeds from State pressure; the tilt of his marvelous hat, the jerk of his Homeric arm, the creak of his patent boot, the turn of his unctuous tongue—these are the outer indications of the modern Atlas.

The Man in the Commons follows: he writes, and creation reads, while the old women gasp, "Wonderful!" He talks, and creation listens, and the young women murmur, "Beautiful!" At home he has a garden, and fidgets and worries that garden till it is bare as a billiard-ball. He has a wife, whom he comprehends in the domestic budget as a pincushion, watch-pocket, or any other useful appendage to the head warder's châtelaine. He is vulgar, but is borne with for being in the House, and his singularities, odious though they be, are described as amiable weaknesses.

The Man on the Bench comes next: he is very clever upon Law, and very ignorant upon Human Nature; professionally he is more Bench than Blackstone, and as coquettish over his wig as a girl of sixty; privately he is mildly insolent, and ever administering small tranquilizing doses of the Queen's Statutes to his intimate friends. He is the idol of little boys about Westminster, and the oracle of top-sided edicts. Nobody can probe his wisdom, and his head is full of Equity as an egg is full of meat; his offspring numbers One, and because the youngster partaketh of the parchment order, he would go to law with Providence in a suit on color. His gesticulation is mediæval, and his eye the misnomer for a filbert; but being on the Bench, and having a string of ragged capitals chasing his name over the public prints, he is much looked up to, is grand vizier and pasha rolled into one, while his oddities are traits of the constitution.

Then comes the Man in the Church: strong on polemics, pauperism, and punch, vestments, cuisine, and scandal; a decided Christian, and orthodox chess-player; good at all sorts of Society meets, from fox-hunts to christenings; perfect at the dance, and somewhat oblivious of the Thirty-nine Articles; charitably inclined, but abstaining upon principle; given to the laying up of treasure and the damning of moths that would corrupt; partial to the Queen, with whom he would play dominos upon the flags of St. Paul's, and having traditional regard for the Fathers, with the stereotyped contempt for Curates. The Man in the Church has quaint theories and unpleasant manners; he talks like a jackdaw and loveth the music, while mankind, with awe-struck reverence, listens to the echo.

The Man in the Peerage follows, whose dignity is not of ancient date, and who did not come over arm in arm with the great William: hence his weakness takes the form of making signboards of the backs of chairs, antlering the passages upon baronial precedent, cutting box into grotesquerie, using massive note-paper with an elaborate heading, and a crest upon every thing, from the ferule of his umbrella to the family warming-pan. The Man in the Peerage walks or rides with an intensity of uprightness painful to people who stoop a little; in Church he repeats the responsive ejaculations viciously, as impressing the Scribes and Pharisees with the presence of a ruler, and he is nowhere greater, unless it be in the poultry-yard, where he disciplines and models. His eccentricities are redolent of arrogance of the most offensive type, and his maternal parent even is embarrassed in his company; yet is he exalted of men and the scarecrow of many an inscript.

The Man who Writes is another select oddity, of intellectual angles and a miscellany of singular graces; he has a hobby, and rides it to death over the foolscap, nobody caring very much for his views, but pronouncing him exceptionally clever. They don't read his books, and let him alone, thinking the contagion more harmless than if it took the form of oratory. Some of the people who come to dinner take away the loans of his genius, which they return as "very fine," without having gone below the title-page. With certain folk he is a superior order of being from having published something, and young ladies who scribble choice extracts in copy-books place him somewhere in a vacant niche between Tupper and Kenealy; but to the generality of people, especially his trades-people, he is an amiable evil, necessary in a mixed constituency, without whom the grave comedy of life would be incomplete.

Then we have acquaintance with the Man who Paints. He has a studio, and it is appointed for all the world like the mere ordinary and vulgar artist's, but the conceptions dating therefrom are of a very different species, unconventional and wonderful, and boldly characteristic of the gentleman painter; queer studies, old saints with much gold at the back, fandango and procession, weird damsels, and grisly ones who may or may not be mammas-in-law, swart beauties trifling with snakes and other likely playthings, florid flowers in dropsical urns supposed to be chased with studies from the mythologies, but which would do as well for naked St. Giles sporting in a coal shed; this is the sort of thing, and the people who want to borrow a little amount call and are in raptures before his art, and speak loudly of his mediæval idealism, his poetry of expression; other people call him a mistake, and think he should leave painting to those who paint for money and thus paint well. One old lady with curls speaks of him, with the door ajar, as Rubens the Second, but in the kitchen as a little cracked, she fears. The Man who Paints is eccentric, and dirty, but very nice, and somewhere, if it would but disentangle from its veil of extravagance, he possesses genuine ability.

This friend is nothing to the Man who Plays, who possesses the genius of concord, and discourses sweet anguish upon the instruments, grimacing the unities until the select circles he favors are seriously indisposed, and from that time forth under medical treatment. The legend runneth that once, at a Penny Reading, where he had been solicited to charm the untutored, he so scared the chairman, the committee, the remaining fellow-beings, and the gas, that the latter went out, as also did the assembly, the pence mysteriously disappearing in conjunction. It is at the evening party the Man who Plays shines with true resplendency, and indulges dramatic scena with hysterical ecstasy upon the piano, until that accommodating board creaks as with influenza. The Man who Plays has singular and conservative notions anent the composers, and considers the institution of notes a monarchic privilege. He is held in particular regard and affectionately remembered, especially during the night, when it is his idea music most soothes.

Among other well-to-do eccentrics whose glazed inscript honors our card-basket, note the Man who Doctors, and seesaws between Anatomy and Surgery; a charming fellow to sit opposite at dinner; he, what time dissection of the turkey proceeds, looking at one suggestively and with a connoisseur's delicacy. He is a rigid scientist and strong believer in the good of pain; he would investigate the shadowy interior of his own pastor, and take a prince to pieces as coolly as a watch-maker would a watch; he has a weakness, and it is vertebræ; he can not hold a book without reversing constructiveness, and when back meets back and there comes the tug of binding, he is keen at the scrutiny of its inner parts; he is a slightly uncomfortable gentleman to shake hands with, giving one the impression of forever fingering for the small bones, and incisively outlining muscle with his finger-nail; he has a craze, and it is cutting up; he has been created reviewer and critic of flesh and of bone, and examiner-in-chief of the human carcass, and he performs his functions to perfection; he is pronounced clever but eccentric; all his friends are afraid of him, and humor his fancies from fear of falling into his hands; they breathe a higher atmosphere in his house, but take care not to be left in the room alone with him; his cook shudders over the dresser when he dashes at a tangent into the kitchen, and she once, in a fit of terror, served up the leeches in melted butter.

The Man with a Warehouse follows next, an important person in the country. He represents Import and Export, shipping interests and commercial prosperity; he is very wealthy, and will dilate upon the process on every available occasion; he is considerable upon literature of exchange, and bale and factory lore; he thinks he is the divinity manufacturers swear by; he is autocrat, and the great uncontradicted; an army of clerks tremble at his nod, and the wholesale is his hemisphere. The Man with a Warehouse has Ledger imprinted upon the cover of his Bible, and is strict as to the business-like piety of his young men, who may devote twenty minutes (sharp) to dinner, and ten (sharp) to prayer. This latter he regards in the light of an appointment, and the young man late in is reprimanded with the expressiveness used by the great man upon being kept waiting in the markets. In his large Manchester hotel he passes all night in feeling the warp and weft of his sheets, and in the dark could tell you the manufacturer; he will rise in the silent and not too lively hours to consult the last night's papers in the coffee-room upon the Indian and American prices. He is a large-hearted philanthropist, and having a great idea of being worshiped, builds chapels by the score, contributing to other erections upon being deferentially solicited to lay the foundation stones. He has one other noble trait in the composition of his colossal character—he is almost matchless at "shaving those city fellows," or, being interpreted, at out-diamonding those unequalled diamonds. The Man with a Warehouse is married; contrived to accommodate an impoverished nobleman, and took the daughter as an acknowledgment—he was so much in the market at the altar that, in reply to the clergyman's necessary questions, he said he would "take the whole piece." Afterward they saw little of each other; although wealthy, he was very much too vulgar for her ladyship to get on with, except in the most distant manner. She alludes to him off-handedly as a good-natured but eccentric person, whose proclivities she is too eccentric herself to dare to meddle with; so she writes a little, and paints a little, and plays a little, and reads a little, and works a little, and chatters a little, all in a languid, senseless, vapid sort of fashion that makes mercantile eccentricity the preferable of the two to those who have the supreme honor of visiting. Their reading is choice if not general: his confined to the Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Wigan, and Liverpool press; hers to the novels, from which she extracts highly distilled men, pomaded, perfumed, and powdered to the most exquisite pitch—these she cherishes one at a time, and thus leads a very gratifying existence. Nothing can exceed the splendor of their residence, or the decision with which he ejects his doubtful cottage tenants. He is unfortunate at being judged hardly; one instance in particular is treasured by the vicar and company; it was when, at a funeral, he spoke of the mourners as "consignees." Of course the poor man was absent again, but having come into the money, his absence was not recognized by the uncharitable. People who think any thing about him—and really not nearly so many do as he imagines—consider him a dry sort of man; but the money, if not the charity, covers a multitude of inequalities, and there can be no doubt about this money, for he is at any time willing to go through entries and double-entries, day-books and ledgers, in support of it.

The Man with Land is an equally interesting study: his habits and customs command the most respectful attention, for he is emphatically ruler of provinces and governor in Egypt; he has what he calls a stake in the country, is an extensive acre-holder, has made cent. per cent. of plots, and expended no trifling amount in prosecuting gypsies over a nettle tract the nomads prefer to regard as no man's; he also is eccentric, given to grumbling, and looking on other men's boundaries through blue glasses (he holds a mistake was perpetrated about Genesis time, or when chaos came out in leasehold a larger share would have been apportioned to himself); he takes geologic ethics like truffles, and somewhere has a musty old will wherein he specifies the quality of mould he decides for the *ultimum remedium.* The Man with Land crows over his dust-heap until other birds peck at it, and then there is much fluttering. The prime strategy, however, is converting it to building purposes, and huge black and white boards crop up in view of city men going home on summer evenings, until some pioneer with a fancy for air and a wide tract thinks one of these old fields would be an admirable place to build a comfortable dwelling—plenty of room for a kitchen-garden, and nice and near the line: it may be nice and near a swamp, but seeing there are only the wife and youngsters to live in it, that is not of much consequence. So a settlement is formed, and the Man with Land rubs his hands placidly over the post, for another town is set going. Anon the rows spring up, men going home each evening see more progress, and as this is nearer than where they may be bound for, it is talked of, and houses let before the roofs are on, and foolish people brave all sorts of malady, as though this old field were the edge of the world. Then a public-house is born, with a church at its tail, and the Man with Land is responsible for both, some other man creating shops and lesser and greater business marts. After a while a station obtrudes its impudent little shed, and the Man is one of the first to patronize the company's enterprise, just running down to see how things are looking. From frequent repetition of this naïve process the Man in the sere and yellow leaf is of largely funded interests, much looked up to, and generally esteemed. He has one or two odd ways, but these are mere harmless eccentricities, which of course every one has, somehow or other.

Quite of a different order is the Man who Buys old furniture. He, before this became the fashionable craze, used to be regarded as very eccentric indeed. He is fastidious as to period; neither an Anne nor a Louis pleasing him under certain conditions. He is suspicious of deception, and sounds Chippendale with the anguish of a Rubens-hunt; he knows that new things, from pottery to cabinets, are turned out as near the ancient as can be, and to obviate the danger of being taken in after all, he confines research to the old curiosities, as abounding in the weird dens where they store such, and from the ransack of these in the several big cities he has corridors and chambers and halls and staircases of quaint construction, gloomy of complexion, diabolical of carving, and altogether ugly. His calm but nervous housekeeper, who looks as though she had come in in one of the drawers, starts at every turn, and leads a life of martyrdom among the wood. The Man who Buys is well known to the brokers, and these gentry pounce on a specimen upon the vulture principle, attending the likely sales in his interests. It is an entirely new sensation, visiting at one of his overcrowded mansions, and afterward experiencing something of relief upon catching sight of the homely and modern deal kitchen table. A few pieces of this sort of ware go a long way, but when it comes to weighting every floor until they groan, it *is* trying to the nerves, as the housekeeper thinks. Altogether, this refined taste, like a good many others, pleases nobody so much as the owner; and as that is the main point, not to put it selfishly, the world wags on about the same, perhaps a little more comfortably, for some of its lumber being cleared.

A very charming person is the Man with a Cellar, eccentric upon vintages and brands, who possesses wines of classical history, from cellars of sovereigns, centuries back; he is a connoisseur of the most delicate palate, and will define the bouquet to the tenth of a shade. The chances are you will be invited to those lower regions, where the very spiders partake of the richness of barrel and bin, and the dust is a tapestry of wonder. If you are strong and return alive, it will be a journey to remember. His one weakness is this cellar, and, unfortunately for the friends who look in so often, nothing ever comes out of it; no, the nectar upon which they are regaled is bought in cheap dozens at the family grocer's. They are none the wiser; the Man has a Cellar, *ergo* they have drunk juice of a most choice grape.

Of a calmer order of eccentricity is the Man who deals in Railways, who has a finger in every body's loop-line, and a junction at his back garden gates. His drawing-room is playfully stocked with models of the chief English and foreign lines, and Bradshaw, elaborately bound, lies upon the centre-piece of walnut. He divides Society into first, second, and third class, and the footman who ushers in his guests is instructed to make them show their ticket. Theory is based upon a system of shares, and principle runs smoothly upon sleepers. His library is voluminous upon routes; Murray is held in especial honor; his files are weighty with the railway organs, *Herapath's*, the *News*, and the *Times.* He is never at rest unless rushing off upon some journey or other, and the testimony of his family is that he is a slightly uncomfortable gentleman to reside with. He gives dinner parties, which to his wife he calls netting the directors, and his little meetings of solvent share-holders have become proverbial for taste. He knows the antecedents of all the locomotives, and his little people are named after the same. He has a large family, which he jocularly attributes to having travelled so much. He calls his dining table a refreshment buffet, and buys chiefly of the railway contractors, in whom alone he believes. His wife's boudoir, to her horror, comes out before her most studied guest as the cloak-room, and their sumptuous bath-room passes as the lavatory, until the good lady, one Sunday coming home from church, is so incensed, she tells him she wishes he would lie down on one of his railways and be run over, when it might be he would have had enough of it.

Altogether, as his mania pays and supports position, it is here and there tolerated, and they go into some good Society, where he is spoken of as immensely clever, and, like all clever people, a little eccentric. He hears of it somehow, and takes care to invite these people to the first journey probably time-tabled for a smash.

The Man who has a Theatre is always good to know. He is generally a fool, but that makes it pleasanter, since his beautiful "star," in whose name the commerce part of it flourishes, will smirk to you behind his back, and the Peri trip out of Paradise to lay his ridicule at your feet. Having money, he puts his pieces on very lavishly, and is as oblivious to art and the artistic as to refinement in his galaxy of talent. His stalls are reserved for his set, and the ethics of slave-markets of the East are set out with anatomical patience. The Man with a Theatre always, somehow, under-calculates the cost of his enterprise, and terminates with an act-drop. He is generally friendly or otherwise associated with the Man who Breeds Horses, who hunts, jockeys, and steeple-chases; who is strong upon all four-legged matters, and essentially weak upon his own two; who is redolent of stable, and tremendous with horseshoe jewelry; who can scarcely speak two words straight, and who keeps oaths as the grocers do their French plums, in bottles, but large-mouthed and always to hand. The Man with Horses is a dreadful person, but very popular; he is undoubtedly wealthy, although there is always a little hesitation in people's minds upon his origin; still, he is pronounced a very good fellow. Should the Man with Horses make a little mistake, there is always a cliqued championship to defend it, as an eccentric piece of work, attributable to the excitement attendant upon book-making. He is very intimate with the Man who Shoots; they meet at county dinners and over coverts, and are altogether much of a muchness, except that the Man who Shoots is more of the gentleman, and distinctively of the old school, which is a stamp of his eccentricity at once by latter-day ethics. The Man who Shoots has fowling-pieces on the wall, in kitchen, parlor, and hall, keeps shot-flasks and canisters on the mantels, alarms the frail-nerved on all sorts of occasions, must be forever oiling and rubbing the steel, and is haunted by an idea each night that some vagrant is prowling—foxes for his poultry, gypsies for his peaches, or burglars for his gold cup—and sallies down in the dead of the night, to the consternation of the cook seeing that the cherry-brandy is all right. Great also in the county, in the eyes of political partisans especially, is the Man in the Chair, the lofty and august oracle who is consulted upon every thing, and is the great voice in all matters of vital importance. The Man in the Chair has a manner peculiar to himself, compound, jerking, effervescent; he is autocratic, and yet smooth, as smooth as a sucked jujube on an iceberg. He is to an agreeable extent egotistical and insolent, but this only to intimidate the vulgar, who would make capital out of his grandeur. The Man in the Chair is not by any means to be trifled with.

There is one friend we are always afraid to see come in: it is the Man with Nerves. He is a shocking one to have dealings with, or even the merest passage of social intercourse, for he makes you start at his own supernatural noises (his backbone creaks like a snuff-box, and his joints go off like small guns), and causes a strange creeping to ascend and descend one's entire structure; it is said that he is a little out of sorts, but the truth is, he is of all sorts, combining the grisly horrors of all the nervous fictions unmentionable at midnight. He is equally troublesome in the daylight. He will drop the cream-jug without compunction; and every one knows the confusion thus created, to say nothing of the mess; he will stammer and stutter, and at the dance trip his partner every time below the chandelier, in his fear it is coming down; from this idea he suffers as acutely as did the famous Bertrand from another; to his dismayed vision screws are always wriggling out, and massy construction of metal about to descend and brain him; his keen eye can detect a crack in the timber before ever the timber has begun to weaken, and his subtle nose will trace gas in the room long before it has left the pipe. He is not nice to enter late with at church, as he will stop stock-still in mid-aisle and protest he can go no farther, although the pew-opener awaits by a comfortably cushioned haven just below the pulpit; and he will groove into the pew nearest to hand, albeit there is not room for another hymn-book. He has a comfortable little property, but is afraid of his gamekeepers, trembles at thought of the dogs, would not intrust his quivering members to the mercy of a quadruped, and cautiously avoids proximity to his servants. The Man with Nerves suffers from eccentricity in its sensitive extreme. He may and does visit most of the people of our acquaintance, but there is one he never visits—it is the Man with Daughters, another eccentric, and of the audacious type; for the Man with Daughters is forever pushing the daughters down the throat of the Man who has No Daughters, until it is necessary to be on the alert to escape one or other of these damsels. They dress well, are accomplished, but have been so long prime movers in strategy that their veteran air intimidates; not one of nine has yet flown from the paternal nest, and each season the Man becomes more pushing. He is brusque of tone and business-like in manner, as though his stock was depreciating in value, and people knew it; he feels hardly used, after his trouble of rearing, and, out of pique, would serve the first of his sons-in-law with Leah in lieu of Rachel, for keeping them waiting so long. He has peculiar ideas—thinks the Man with Many Daughters ought to elect his own sons-in-law under authority; he ventilates this among his cronies until they, even, avoid him, as uncertain at any moment but the judgment may fall on their own unoffending shoulders.

We had the pleasure of meeting out, some little time since, the Man who Brews, an eccentric of Conservative and fermented type, with ambition rising far above hopping level; he serves the Queen, not in her own jug, but in the bottled-ale shape, and in the House. He is destitute of refinement, of breeding, of manners, but is looked up to, and the great river from his vats flows from England to Peru, while his wealth is exceeding great also. He is fond of strolling into large refreshment places, where unknown; calling for a bottle of his ale, he will hold the glass up to the light with a knowing twinkle, and wink to its sparkle as to a son he might encounter in his travels in the act of distinguishing himself.

The Man who Brews is intimate with the Man with Bullion. Their villas lie contiguous, their sympathies are identical, their hard-driving principles and crisp, curt manners are the same. The Man with Bullion traffics on 'change, is properly impressed by the greatness of his avocation, feels a pang every time he sees the sacred name of Bank on the omnibuses, looks cautiously at a half-penny to make positively certain it *is* a half-penny before giving it away, stands upon the hearth-rug jingling loose coins in his pocket while studying the money market, and times the arrival of all vessels with specie. Invited out, he thinks of but one thing—consols; he rates virtue by its cash-account, and will have literally nothing to do with the modest-incomed; his manners are dry and hard, he is without feeling; were it possible to mint his flesh and blood into currency, flesh and blood should go. The Man with Bullion is commanding, for he knows Mammon is the god of this world, and that he is his prime minister. The metallic flavor attaching to him is, in his opinion, a note of credit; he has flying loans out in Europe, and thinks even monarchs and princes would very often know short commons if it were not for the most useful of all their subjects, the Man with Bullion.

Far below, but curiously connected in an indirect manner with the preceding, is the Man who Speculates, and who, as a natural consequence, overtops creation one day, and is swearing at his wife in the lowermost depth of the valley the next. The Man who Speculates would not gamble for the world, nor join a lottery; nothing so uncertain. In all his delicate transactions he stands to win, and he wins to stand, for if he loses, he falls; but even then it is no fault of his immaculate speculativeness, but an imperfectly balanced and wrongly constituted order of things; and by some inscrutable reasoning the meek little woman at home, in the drawing-room she knows may be stripped before noon, is at the bottom of it. The Man who Speculates buys public stocks and lands, and if the expected advance foreshortens, he is barbarous enough and eccentric enough to think it has been brought purposely about, as though Providence would interfere with stock-broking.

First cousin to this man is the Man who Contracts: he is more practical, more genuine, but infinitely less agreeable, looking up and down one, and estimating lowest contract price for running one up like us; he would contract with his own hens for eggs in return for grain and grub, and agree with a housewife at so much a year for the feathers working out through the bed-ticking; he will build you a church, he says, seventy-five per cent. lower than the Man who Builds, and as the Man who Builds is one of the old-fashioned, slow-raising ones, the Man who Contracts robs him of the job. Time is his great point—he will do the thing to time, where other men, or men's men, seem to have a singularly inaccurate dealing with that valuable possession. It is not in his working, which is doubtless admirable, that the Man displays his eccentricity, but in his private relations, where, not proving things going according to a system of contract, he storms and blusters in the face of time and every thing else.

Very instructive to watch in operation is the Man of Auctions, for whom room is made while he pushes up to the rostrum, check-book in hand, extraordinary bargains in his eye. This Man seems born for one great end and purpose—to carry off the surplus furniture of public sales. The Man of Auctions is a gentleman; he is wealthy; he has a hankering after curious and antique works; he collects old china; dabbles in pictures; has some treasures according to Moses, but very few by the valuation of Smith, who has something to do with Burlington House; he is partial to old cameos, bronzes, and other hardware; and behind his dingy mansion he has stored a variety of odd things, including a foot-warmer, said to have belonged to Julius Cæsar, and the shutter of the original ark.

In sober earnest, one has not to go very far in search of the eccentric, be it in high life, low life, or that middle stratum of which the true-born Englishman is so fond. The eccentric, the peculiar, the odd, the queer, the irregular, the unconventional, the anomalous, the singular, the particular, the strange, the whimsical, the droll, the fantastical, the grotesque, and the out-of-the-common altogether, may be met with at any hour; and with exercise of patience and tolerance, a vastly suggestive study it is.

Seldom is opportunity afforded of studying as unique a quartette of eccentrics as were assembled, one evening toward the end of October, in the private parlor of the "Seven Tuns," an old-fashioned and highly respectable hostelry in Bishopsgate. The firm of BARNARD, ROLF, & COMPANY, Merchants, Brokers, Commission Agents, Legal Advisers, Loan Discounters, Money-changers, Bill Negotiators, Freehold, Copyhold, and Leasehold Proprietors, Assurance Promoters, Share and Deposit Holders, and Scamps in general, had met for business; and an audacious and thoroughly villainous firm it was, but as eccentric as villainous.

First, there was the chief of the bureau, with his tall form and saturnine visage, with that trappish click of the teeth, and livid features, and the cold gray pitiless eyes. He was in the chair, leaning elbows on table, resting high cheek-bones on his clinched hands, and looking over these with lynx-like minuteness at his partners. On his right was seated Mr. Bartholomew Rolf, one of the most astonishing beings, so far as appearances went, who had ever patronized the "Seven Tuns." Tall as his chief, but older, he possessed the power of imparting a gravity to his countenance which comes of age, if not of wisdom; yet his head, and the general cast and contour, were of more gross and cunning type, and it was pretty evident, from outer signs alone, this man would not hesitate to perform much that his superior might decline. Mr. Rolf was bald-headed, merely a scanty circle of iron gray hair round the back; his features were florid, sharply prominent, and presented a voracious and wolfish expression. Mr. Bartholomew had been nurtured upon bubble companies and fed on forty years' frauds, and yet was extant, to meet his friends with the serious enjoyment and grave decorum of a board director in the hoar and honored years. Upon the left, Mr. Stephen Miles, the colorless gentleman, with the unearthly roll of the eyes—the valued treasurer and specie authority of the firm—whom, although so extremely indistinct of shading, the chief would on no account have lost from their respected number. Mr. Stephen's services were of an especially particular sort, and such as, even by adding to their limited liability company, might not have been secured again. Thus this esteemed *confrère* would on emergency forge like an expert, and could, if required, go the great length of discovering a fire at an opportune situation. None of this able band was remarkable for virtues, but without a doubt Stephen Miles was the most awful rogue of them all. The remaining member has yet to make acquaintance with the Reader—to whom the Author's apology for the disreputable introduction. This was Coke O'Connor, Attorney at Law, retained by the firm upon a policy pre-eminently allied with human cautiousness, and, to render all strictly secure, admitted one of the firm. When Mr. Noel Barnard, influenced by motives of prudence, looked about him for a clever, shrewd, and conscientiously unprincipled lawyer, he came upon Coke O'Connor, probably the greatest rascal practicing, and of whom he immediately thought highly, since he (O'Connor) had in a certain matter emphatically worsted the renowned Noel. The latter was not dilatory in any matter, and came to terms with the rascal at once, the process of which was characteristic and instructive.

"I want a man," said Barnard, "like yourself, to do some dirty work; only it won't do to be fastidious."

"What do you stop at? What are the terms? And for how long?"

"We draw the line at bodily injury; terms, third of a half; time, unlimited; joining, *bona fide*."

"Good! I'm your man!"

"Legal counsel we want; men we can get by the gross, for our profits are large."

"You but qualify the dignity, Sir. At what date will my services be acceptable?"

"Instantly. I know every thing on earth, except the law, and that was always so unsavory, I couldn't tackle it; but now I am determined to conquer the law, or, in my ignorance, the law may conquer me. The only defense an honest man has in this land is to master the law. What say you, O'Connor? Eh?"

"Your sentiments do you honor, Sir," said O'Connor, much impressed by the supernatural twirl the tactician gave to one of his serpentine limbs, and thinking that if he had ever wished for the Evil One as a client, he must catch at this opportunity.

"Then sit down, will you? And we'll get to work!"

They sat down at the stained desk in a dull room of the dingy house where, as a bedimmed plate outside warned the public of London, Mr. O'Connor, Attorney, abode. They sat down, and studied hard for hours, the lawyer cramming that long head beside him until it seemed lengthened by several inches; went over probabilities, and went into possibilities; cut away round loop-holes, and hunted up risk, with its correlative of escape; bared all the elasticity, and uncompromisingly laid a veto on the iron and exacting. Any other brain would have collapsed: Mr. Barnard's increased its range, its clearness, its appreciation, and its insight, the farther they went and the longer they kept at it. A spare youth, of much grime and many ink stains, was dispatched for slight refreshment, which the two devoured without rising from the desk, and pursuing the abstruse study all the time. Straight through all the quips of law, like another Cépola, whose "Devices" Coke O'Connor had the pleasure of introducing to his indefatigable pupil, did the Mentor cicerone his future partner; and, after a day of it, Mr. Barnard rose Master of the Constitution.

Mr. Coke O'Connor, like the three gentlemen with whom he was associated, happened to be a tall, gaunt man, with limbs that he never seemed to know how to use, and which presented the appearance of having been fixed to the trunk in a hurry, and to have been selected at random from a heap: certain it is they were all odd, and always upon the fidget. Mr. Coke O'Connor's head seemed to have been elongated in a press. His clerk, the young gentleman afore-named, once stated that his employer had been hung up by the eyelids when a youth, a method of accounting for the telescopic phenomenon upon picturesque principles. The attorney's hair was very black, and he wore a sharply finished imperial; his eyebrows were peculiar, meeting at an angle in the centre, under which his eyes shone hard and bright as a pair of new shoe-buttons.

He was seated, as was seemly, *vis-à-vis* with the head of the firm. Mr. O'Connor's value had been fully tried and tested: Mr. O'Connor's advice had more than once proved preventive in cases where it might not have been as convenient of curing: Mr. O'Connor had fully substantiated his claim to the disregard of the fastidious: Mr. O'Connor had developed from a nobody, a mere obscure attorney, into a person of importance, to whom those in doubt or in difficulty resorted, to their profit, and to the profit of the firm in the background. Thus, representing the Law—for which the firm entertained profound respect—Coke O'Connor worthily occupied the vice-chair.

The firm had been assembled some few minutes; desultory talk opened proceedings; then the lithe white hand of the leader started up like a spectral finger-post, and—

"To business!"

The solemn calling to order produced a dead silence, midst of which the awful orbs of Stephen Miles performed a solo after the style of the revolving organs of those colored minstrels specially noted for practicing the feat.

"Reports!"

From the president. O'Connor took from his breast pocket some papers tied round with pink tape. He turned these down rapidly, selecting those required, and keeping the others beside him for reference. Then he cleared his throat, all his limbs working as though pulled with a string.

"CHEFFINGER!" said Mr. O'Connor.

"Hem!" From the president, serpentine below table, which Mr. Miles seemed to trace through the wood.

"Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger—Cheffinger Abbey—five hundred pounds: as many thousand when we've locked up his cousin Dickson in a mad-house."

The three long heads nodded, the eyes in the colorless head betokened intensity of relish. The legal member of the firm proceeded:

"TRAVERS! Mother and child traced to Hertfordshire: George Percival, then at home, proved a friend—mother and child staid at farm until she accepted situation as companion to a family in town. Child at farm now."

"Name of family?"

From the chief, over his tightened fists: calmly, yet with low-breathing interest, eyes like two sparks of fire.

"Sir Horace Vivian, Belgrave Square; young ladies about to visit Lady Vivian, who is staying at Nice for her health."

The chief looked significantly at Bartholomew Rolf; the look was understood; then he said,

"We undertake to provide for Dickson Cheffinger!" and again his myrmidon apprehended the meaning.

"This Percival family seem bent on giving us trouble; Mr. Miles will see to this?"

That worthy bowed, and looked down on his finger-nails, one of which, greenish-yellow from a bruise, seemed to exercise a fascinating effect. The chief kept microscopic watch upon each member of the company.

"Proceed!"

"VINCENT! Son in London, studying at South Kensington: has received written information from Sleperton of a private visit to the Manor by Lord Lindon; with directions to—"

But the attitude of the chief stayed conclusion of the sentence.

"One moment—the motive of Lord Lindon's visit?"

"To ascertain for himself if correct that the mansion was being renovated prior to the return of Lady Lindon."

"And Mrs. Vincent knew of his lordship's visit?"

"They had an interview in the Manor-house at night."

"The widow's cue?"

"Making him additionally jealous and incensed, through—the Minister!"

"Clever woman, most consummate artist. Go on."

"GORDON! Now at country studio of Lord Frank Ellerby, the aristocratic painter."

"Good!" The president might have been of German extraction, so guttural was that satisfaction.

"With him a girl known as Lena St. Aubyn; quitted her home during absence of guardian; they are often together; his lordship has done 'em on canvas; very fond of both; the boy and girl contemplate some day going forth together on search for something; don't furnish what."

Click, click, went the president's teeth, tighter clinched the fists; there was no other sign of emotion and marvelous surprise, not to say awe, at the strange nature of that revelation, which perhaps no one could have apprehended with the same sensations. Then he spoke:

"I will attend to this myself;" and the three heads nodded in deference.

"ST. AUBYN! Of Yorkshire; employing three Private Inquiry and Scotland Yard detective officers for the recovery of said Lena St. Aubyn, his adopted daughter: a reward, on the quiet, of one thousand pounds."

"Good!" Guttural and German again; the two serpentine limbs below the table described a circle as embracing something.

"BEECH! Bird-catcher; now in Brighton; been seen to enter the house of Westley Garland, Preacher."

"Confusion!" muttered the chief, knitting his brows; more Mephistopheles than ever.

"Attended a week-night service conducted by the said preacher—"

"The fool!" breathed Noel, in a low and deep under-tone, and with expressive contempt.

"Is at honest work," continued the legal adviser, with imperturbable gravity; "cab-driver, No. 175; cab-rank, Old Steine; lodging, 13 Edward Street."

"Bartholomew, you will oblige?" The chief bowed gravely to Bartholomew; Bartholomew could not have looked more venerably serious had he been the chief's father.

"CADDIE! Investment. Secured a thousand: also title-deeds to building property: effected through our branch office in the South."

President Barnard smiled diabolically. Treasurer Miles notched the table with thumb-nail as indicating dot and carry one. The president motioned the speaker to proceed.

"GARLAND! House called Moated Grange, Hawkingdean; under-ground passage from cellar, communicates with broken arch at foot of the garden, whereby the cavaliers of Charles's day might conceal or escape: now disused, passage closed up by means of locked doors; had the pleasure of securing the old key."

Saying which, the lawyer placed upon the table a huge rusty key, of a kind sometimes seen in the doors of ancient churches.

This closed the reading of the reports, and the industrious advocate refolded the papers with care, and tucked them, with other pleasant memoranda, under the tape.

Then the president rose to speak. He addressed the meeting with affable suavity, yet with that nameless superiority which arises of high-class education, travel, and mixing much with people in the higher walks.

"We are again indebted, gentlemen, to the estimable and faithful service of our trusty coadjutor; allow me to pass a few remarks upon our recent successes and future policy."

The president bowed, and, sitting down, assumed a profoundly ministerial air. There was a dead silence, the homage unmatriculated villainy pays to villainy that has matriculated; it was interrupted by Bartholomew rubbing his bald head as far as the fringe; it might have merely been the florid richness of complexion, but Bartholomew looked warm.

"I will put this in as few words as possible, our time being very valuable. To begin where our friend left off; a subject just now of most importance, since there is no doubt this Minister will, if he can contrive it, be quits with us yet; he has gained one advantage, although not one of important service to himself, in securing the deed upon which I sought to obtain the Cheffinger signature. Now, gentlemen, to glance back a moment! After the Eagle Hall disaster we accomplished so cleverly, Lionel Travers, ruined, shame-stricken, melancholy, despairing, and half maddened, fled from the scene, courting death before world-wide blazoned-forth dishonor; as though" (added the speaker, bitterly) "that would avert it, or satisfy one determined upon their drinking the cup of humiliation to the dregs, and very dregs! He was rescued from death by drowning, and by a servant of Lord Guilmere's, who had the body conveyed, at the desire of his lordship, to their house; he was then tended by her ladyship, with the devotion a woman might display to her own son, and was lying there some days. Upon recovering, the repugnance to returning to old scenes, the supposition Beresford Travers would, believing with the rest of the world that he was dead, provide for his wife and child, and the scheme—as I understand it now —of clearing himself with all men and with his family, of honestly satisfying all demands, and restoring his wife to her old position, induced him to conceal his recovery and whereabouts both from her and others; and he seems to have entertained and to have successfully carried out a project at once clever and daring. Although, following upon his old inclinations, there is nothing so very remarkable about it, after all. Through the interest of Lady Guilmere, to whom it is just possible he disclosed all, this Brighton living was procured for him by the late Earl of Heronby, her ladyship's father; and from an insignificant proprietary chapel his genius has raised this to the front rank of popular churches, and himself to the foremost of modern ministers. I am careful to dwell upon this, because it is so much the better for us. We have allowed this brilliant phœnix, hatched by reed and sedge at sunset, to acquire his full growth and fuller plumage, that we may pluck him a second time, and with yet greater pleasure. Depend upon it, friends, this idol of the crowd and alchemist, who has discovered the true secret of gold-coining, has but one purpose at heart, and that I have explained to you. For that he is amassing his hundreds and thousands; and so much the better for us. We will step in ere very long and undertake the care of this tithe and levy and tax imposed upon credulous Christians. Gentlemen, it is our duty to stand by the Christians—as the Christians have so often stood by us. Why should we see an estimable body of people robbed of their hard-earned savings? What are we? Are we vulgar schemers, coarse conspirators, dabblers in chicanery, and blunderers in fraud? No, gentlemen, but merchants and bankers, carrying on a system of operation based upon legitimate business, and with that ancient and honored system of laying hands upon all we can, which established your ancestors and my ancestors, and which establishes their descendants."

"Hear! hear!" from Mr. O'Connor, plucking tenderly at his imperial, while the awful eyes of Stephen Miles rolled from its point to the bald head of Mr. Bartholomew, and from there to the long thin face of Nero, where it dwelt approvingly while he proceeded.

"We will not go into a question of antecedents; you know we are *gentlemen*, and incapable of the low extremes to which uncultivated men venture in pursuit of gain, of position, of self-aggrandizement. I know you to be educated, men of wealth, family, and position, but you have distributed that wealth for the benefit of the world in general, you have quarreled with the family accounting such quarrel profit, and have kicked position out of the balance, leaving that to lesser mortals. Gentlemen, you have a grudge against Society, Society has a grudge against you; Society is proverbially sneakish, and if you don't take care of yourself Society will prey upon you —it is ever the fate of the innocent and unsuspecting; gentlemen, I commend your foresight. I have been to the wall myself (although half-brother to a baronet), and a very rough wall it is! You are aware *my* war with Society dates from a very early period, when my father, Sir Kinnaird Dalton, Baronet, conveniently played fast and loose with Hagar, the beautiful daughter of Jael-Ishmael, reader of stars and king over gypsies, whom he met at Epsom plying the calling of their people, and lied to under name of one Barnard. Thus, gentlemen, having in my veins the old but contemptible blood of Dalton to counteract the venerated royalty there engrafted, you quite understand how simple a thing it would be for me to perform an undignified and despicable action, and how morally and virtuously impossible it is for that action ever to be performed by myself."

The chief looked round with the pride and importance of a plenipotentiary; the meeting was used to the strategy of the chief, and the meeting bowed back respectfully.

"Therefore, gentlemen, it would be an obvious impracticability to permit these Christians to be aggrieved and oppressed by this designing person, who is presuming upon a faith as ancient and honored as my royal grandparent's. In the interests of humanity we foreclose—the correct word, Coke?—and preclude further havoc in the sheep-fold. I have been giving this painful subject deep reflection. I am disposed to be merciful, for we are all sinners; and although, when a Minister gives way to greed, it is the most sorrowful of all spectacles, yet we can not tell but that, if we were exposed to similar temptations, we might do even likewise; thus I am placed awkwardly, the whole body of humanity upon one side, and this fallen nature, like a second Lucifer, gentlemen, upon the other! I will not admit sentiment to our conference—I have already decided without it—yet with all mercy, and, gentlemen, without overstraining that amiable quality. Our Minister shall hand over the whole of his ill-gotten gain to our better keeping, reserving only sufficient to carry him as missionary to those blacks who will eat him and his books after one of their triumphs of seasons!"

Which sally excited appreciative derision, Mr. Miles, being an admirer of authorcraft, especially enjoying the finale of their chief immensely. It was Mr. Coke O'Connor who ventured with,

"But how is it to be done, Sir? This Minister is an awkward customer to tackle."

"Our friend has spoken well," said the chief, with sententious brevity; "permit me to reply to the question raised. A Minister is public property, his coat is for every fool to pick holes in; we who are wise may slit and rend it from top to bottom. Each tea table in Brighton is busy at discussion of his merits and demerits, two-thirds at endeavoring to glean something derogatory to his character and reputation, the remaining third at inventing what the other two are seeking for. We shall not find it arduous assisting one or the other; the Minister, particularly the popular Minister, being pre-eminently a target for scandal. I'll tell you something: when Lionel Travers was at Torquay he rendered a service to one Evelyn, a poor curate, who possessed a beautiful daughter, whom Travers, all in a friendly sort of way, played Abelard to. Friend Stephen, I mark a naughty twinkle in thine eye, and I am sorry—not, Sir, that all the Beresfords and Traverses are immaculate. My old pupil—perhaps thanks to my moral training—was always a model; but, gentlemen, Miss Constance Evelyn often visited the Hall, was friendly with —with Lionel's wife and with Lionel. Of course the friendship continues, and— In short, gentlemen, I shouldn't be surprised if Brighton were to discover a very pretty scandal—very pretty indeed! And if any one here assembled can declare a more henious act than for a Minister, courted, looked up to, a leader of public opinion, possessed of unequalled genius, foremost in the Church, relied upon by all good and Christian folk, not one of whom would decline leaving the most loved and jealously guarded of daughters in his care—if one here assembled can declare a more iniquitous deed than for such a one to mislead the daughter of his curate, let him declare it, or forever hold his peace!"

With a look of mock horror and shocked and outraged indignation, the chief awaited any such declaration, the attorney murmuring, "Horrible—horrible indeed!"

"Thanks, gentlemen," said the president, bowing with native elegance, "for the confidence you repose in me. Well, our Minister shall totter upon his stand, and it doesn't take much to overturn a popular favorite, you know, especially in the Church. He shall be blackened, and whitened, and reddened with a vengeance. We have only to lower that unbecoming pride, and make his reputation a thing for every ignoramus to have a fling at; when we will threaten, if he does not hand over the wealth obtained under a false name —mark you, under a false name—to expose him and disclose all. And if he shunned the public humiliation *then*, what will he do *now*, eh, gentlemen?"

"Good!" grunted Mr. O'Connor, with professional relish, for he considered his chief had made a point.

"And we will permit—we will permit the alternative of his quietly leaving the country—after transferring his passable little treasury to ourself. Very well; now supposing, being a high-spirited one, he kicks? Then, my friends, I will hold *his child* in reserve. Bartholomew will take a trip down to Hertfordshire and bring her to town, and here keep her until wanted. He loves his child, would have her with him, but could not as he is situated at present; and to the best of our belief, he is ignorant of the child's hiding-place. He'll go quick enough for her."

There was silence, only broken by Rolf mumbling to himself, "Child—Beech—Vivian—Cheffinger." He felt his hands full, and did not want to forget any thing. The amphibious-looking Stephen took out his lizard-green pocket-handkerchief and wiped the palms of his hands. Mr. Coke O'Connor pursed up his lips and said nothing, but stared hard, and perhaps thought the more.

"Have I made it plain, gentlemen, this Minister is to run to the end of his tether and no farther?"

"It is irrevocable as fate." Thus Mr. Miles, with lachrymose effect.

"Very well; then we will drop this, and turn to other matters. Friday Street accounts, if you please, Mr. Rolf."

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CHAPTER XLIII.

GABRIELLE BECOMES CRITIC.

Toward the end of October, London was just beginning to put on that cheery look which betokens the fireside season. Crimson curtains displaced the muslin, and framed interiors, lighted up and inviting, tantalized the lonely bachelors journeying home from City work to comfortless rooms, wifeless, childless, fireless; pleasing, however, to those going home to such delights, causing wearied lips to wreathe with smiles while thinking of the rosy faces circled round the fire that would be all joy and gladness with the welcoming. From his seat upon the omnibus, George Percival saw into many such a home at this drawing-in period of the year, saw what he admired with so exquisite a refinement—the comfortable fireside, the homely room, the children gathered about the tea table. They were soon past, the pictures fled like views of a phantasmagoria, and London looked more gray and grim for the contrast. He grew to know the houses where these pictures gleamed, to know the members of the circles, to look for passing these each evening: it lessened distance, lightened the way. They looked so happy, the woman with a boy standing arm about her neck, the man with a girl at his knee, a proud smile sunning the face that had all day been care-worn and harassed—so happy, it made the extreme gentility and cold decorum of Queen Street almost repelling. People did not have children in Queen Street, nor did they believe in any similar institution involving noise or merriment. Of course there were sons and daughters, but they were all grown up, and so far as Queen Street was concerned, always had been grown up. Catch a little one disturbing the neat arrangement of those geometric gardens! All the highly burnished knockers up and down the street would have risen and fallen with outraged protest. No hoops came trundling along its quiet pavement—the very iron lids over the coal cellars would have started up and opposed it. So decided, indeed, was the prejudice, the street might have been given over to a colony of decorous spinsters and bachelors. George did not like it, and sometimes would wander for relief round the infinitely less genteel streets. It was so real a pleasure to him to see the children, in their homes or in the streets; no matter if wild and untidy as drawing-rooms go; he loved them with the genuine feeling which requires no first decking forth with bows and tuckers. And coming home as described night after night, his thought was ever with that project of his—Why should they not have one such in that great ten-roomed house of theirs? It would do the carpets good, cheer the whole place, enliven that dull street. "Never do, George," said inner self. "It is not as though you were in a house of your own; and Aunt Percival is a curious body to introduce any thing of the sort to! And dear Gabrielle?" Well, Gabrielle would give that placid, calm assent of hers, just to please himself; but he would ever feel restraint, knowing the thoughtful eyes were upon every movement, the ears pained by every word addressed endearingly to another, although but a child. "The fact is," said George to himself, "a man is placed in a very equivocal position, situated as I am. I do not want to hurt Gabrielle's feelings, for she is a dear, good girl, and I should be sorry to run counter to my estimable uncle and aunt; but I certainly wish I either had some little friend who could run in of an evening and make the place *human*, or else that I knew some fellow who would ask me to spend the evening sometimes with his family; but all the men I know are either unmarried or haven't any family. I declare I feel sometimes as though I could make friends with a bricklayer, and drink tea out of an old brown tea-pot, for the sake of feeling a little sociable and informal, rough and ready with his little ones!"

It was all very nice going home regularly to a tick of the clock, being let in by Gabrielle, with undeviating punctuality and with a smile that, meet smile or no, was always there to receive him, fair as some angel greeting; all very nice finding slippers and dressing-gown ready placed with his easy-chair to a turn of the scroll on the carpet; very nice to have Gabrielle bring her quiet work every evening and sit silent while he wrote, yet so often looking up at the face bent over the writing; so nice, and uniform, and uneventful, so still and tranquil, with its unromantic routine, he slightly wearied of it, and rather longed for change, yet would have asked no change but the one he would most have welcomed, the introduction of that most perfect antidote to the uniform—childhood! Besides, it is a slightly embarrassing feeling to be ever in the company of so divine a character as was that of Gabrielle, consciously far from her equal in point of merit, of sincerity, of emotional affection; feeling to be placed in a false position, and to be altogether at a disadvantage, since expected every evening to declare a profession of love than which nothing was farther from immediate intention; a peculiarly embarrassing feeling to know one is looked upon as a son-in-law without experiencing that innate delight which is natural under the circumstances. George Percival probably loved Gabrielle as much as he had ever loved any one in his life, perhaps more; yet the very fact of always having been her companion (which caused the love Gabrielle experienced for himself to be so fine a sentiment, so firm a passion, so deep, so true), was of itself sufficient to counteract the germ of love which thrives best upon novelty.

He went home one evening—one of those October evenings—feeling chill and depressed, as the finer natures are very apt to feel when nearing that trying month, November.

Gabrielle received him as usual, took his hat and coat and umbrella, and then, throwing open the door of his room, disclosed a bright fire, his chair wheeled from the window to its side, table and draught-board just by, a book he was reading, the evening paper, and his slippers leaning against the fender before the fire.

"Well, this is something like!" Rubbing his hands, reviving on the instant, and of course marching over to the hearth-rug and taking up his position back to the fire.

"I fancied you felt a little dull, dear, last evening; the fire is cheering!"

"Yes, very cheering!" He was thinking of those interiors: then conscience smote him; he went up to her, and taking her hands, looked gratefully into the clear eyes: "And my Gabrielle is a good, kind, thoughtful one, considerate as ever!"

She was so pleased by even that admission: a pleasant praise it was to her, even as though Heaven-sent, and to compensate her for long waiting.

"Uncle and aunt gone out?"

"Yes, they have gone to the Poppets to tea and supper; so, Mr. George, we've a long evening before us, if you are disposed to talk, or read me some more of the manuscript."

And after he had partaken of his usual tea-dinner, and they were seated by the fire, George leaning back in the easy-chair, toes close to the bars, and looking so very unlike reading, Gabrielle felt quite a little flutter as she thought, "*He is going to talk!*" After settling thus, and evidently, from the intent look at the burning coals, with something upon his mind, there were a few minutes' pause, Gabrielle at her calm and methodical plain work for some poor pensioner, yet inwardly agitated and thrilled by expectancy, and thinking, "*There is nothing like a fire for inspiring a man with remembrance of the domestic!*" A pause that was broken by a sigh from the recesses of the easy-chair; and from over the work it was answered by a little faint apology for another—quite faint and indistinct, as scarce venturing to lift its bold fac-simile, the fair echoist thinking, "*Surely sighs prelude confession!*" And after that the man in the chair sighed back, louder than hers yet lower than his first, and fidgeted, drew the chair closer to the fire, and consequently closer to her upon the opposite side, so that she thought, while sewing the gusset deftly, "*I am sure drawing up a chair denotes something out of the ordinary!*" And she ventured to peep up at him. He didn't look overpleasant, but no matter, it was like the maiden speech; and every body knows the anxiety that is to a man.

She was full of tolerance, not in the least impatient. She had been waiting since sixteen, and knew it would come some time or other. "*These authors,*" she thought, "*are not like other mortals, but when they love, they love!*" Then suddenly she was all vivid attention, for he knocked over the fire-irons, and that would certainly awaken him to the existence of the audience, if any thing would. Yes, he was about to speak; and trembling a little with soft, delicious emotion, which she could barely credit—remembering it was past thirty by the time of life—she heard, "I've a little something I have been waiting the opportunity of telling you, Gabrielle, which may as well be told now; indeed, I shall seek to enlist your sympathy, ay, and I hope, win your co-operation."

She nodded kindly, looking very interested, but in her heart thinking it a queer commencement, and, with the rapidity of thought one exercises at such times, running the gauntlet of connective probabilities. It was something he had been waiting the opportunity of telling her; that looked in her favor, very much in her favor. But then the seeking to enlist her sympathy—was that usual? Well, of course, her sympathy would be enlisted; it was only one of George's figurative modes of speech. But that "co-operation"—detestable word that. Gabrielle did not half like it; she waited, however, and the lover-cousin spoke again.

"I met with a little adventure, dear Gabrielle, when at home, this year, upon my holiday, which I have never told you of. I was impressively entreated not to speak of it if I could any way avoid doing so, and I entertained such reluctance to thus making it a matter of conversation, I *have* avoided doing so."

"Yes, dear!"

It was said with perfect quietness, but there was the feeling he might at least have told her. There was mention of that holiday, since when he had never been quite the same to her, and it turned her cold; there seemed, after all, some little mistake about this talk.

"You remember our favorite walk along that tributary of the Lea, which flows at the foot of the old Priory grounds?"

"Yes, dear!"

It was very trying having it thus recalled; she remembered but too well; for when boy and girl they had chased dragon-flies upon the banks of the streamlet, and plaited rushes while sitting upon the grass, he telling her tales, composed with due regard to the dramatic, dear to childhood. The allusion to the Priory itself, the quaint, picturesque old ruin, beneath the shade of which so many long drowsy afternoons had fled, was well-nigh sufficient to fill her eyes with tears. However, it was "Yes, dear!" It was always "Yes, dear!" with gentle Gabrielle.

"You are not to expect any thing romantic, you know; merely the relating of an opportune service it was placed in my power to perform."

What a long time it seemed coming; she could have jumped up and caught the words, they seemed so slow in rising to the lips. How quiet it was without! Not a sound, for half Queen Street went to bed at seven o'clock, and the other half crept along the pavement and in at the richly grained doors, silent as mice.

"It was near by the bridge you used to be so fond of standing upon. Perhaps, because of this, I was tempted to lean over and look down into the water."

How pleased she felt at that! "*Dear old fellow!*" she said to herself, looking up wistfully; it takes so much to satisfy one.

"It was late in the evening; I think almost near to starlight: that hushed season we used to love so well."

It was awfully tantalizing! Was he trying to enlist her sympathy by reviving old slumbering joys, or was there no second thought at all?

"I had not been feeling very well all day—I think—no, I am sure, I had not! Hence my taking that quiet and unfrequented walk at that hour."

She did not very much want to hear all this preliminary, and wished he would come to it at once, whatever it was. If there was one thing Gabrielle disliked more than another, it was beating about the bush. Cousin George poked the fire.

"I remember it was a most beautiful evening; I can almost hear those grasshoppers now."

She gave a little tug at the calico; nay, the veriest pull, as testing the texture.

"And I walked thoughtfully on to that bridge."

Gabrielle thought this a suspension-bridge. She rose and walked thoughtfully to the door, to let the cat in. It jumped upon George's knee, and began to purr fondly; it was so much in Gabrielle's confidence it could scarcely do otherwise. What a peaceful scene it was! how like to man and wife, and cat, especially the latter, if the proverbial instability be correct!

"—When I heard a cry, a child's cry of alarm, then a scream for help! I dashed to the spot from whence it proceeded, and found a girl struggling in the water. I at once brought her out of the unpleasant, if not dangerous, predicament, and, bending over her, asked how she came there. By the light still lingering I saw the little face lifted to my own, one of the most winning and lovable I had ever seen."

Gabrielle's hands were lying perfectly motionless upon the work. She was not surprised, or absorbingly interested, or foolishly jealous, but she was impressed by the coincidence of the striking resemblance to her dream.

"She told me that, as she was stooping to cup some water in the joined hollows of her hands, the soft bank gave way, and she fell headlong into the water. She said she was more frightened than hurt, and I am sure was as much hurt as she was frightened; but more than either was her eagerness to get away from me. My curiosity was aroused, for she seemed no ordinary child; although the garments were such as the poor cottage children wear, there was a refinement and prettiness about the speech equal in every respect to such as might characterize a child of the upper classes. The loneliness of her situation quite moved me, and I begged she would explain it. There was manifest reluctance; but, after a little, bursting into tears, she told me that herself and mother had been walking all day; her mother was very weak, and had taken no food, and had been seized with faintness within the Priory. I could not leave them thus; the child's position seemed too desolate, and I remarked an exquisite tenderness in her manner of speaking of her mother."

"No," said Gabrielle, looking thoughtfully into the fire, "it would not have been right to leave them in so lonely a situation."

"I took the child's hand, and said I would accompany her to the ruins; but she firmly declined my so doing. No, her mother would recover soon, and they would continue their way. I told her I lived close by, and might be of service; I offered to go for any restoratives the lady might require; I placed our home at her disposal, if she would permit me to escort her to it, and my sympathy impressed the child. With a beautiful movement, she gave me her hand and conducted me to her mother. I found the lady suffering from complete prostration, and I believe she had but recently passed through some severe mental ordeal."

"Poor thing!" murmured Gabrielle.

"The light was too dim in the shadowy old place to detect the lady's appearance; but the voice that thanked me, of inexpressible sweetness, denoted one of gentle breeding, and I felt deeply interested in the fate of these unfortunates, who might, for all I knew, have been overwhelmed by some sad disaster. I offered my friendly aid in any way, and begged their acceptance of such homely hospitality as the farm afforded."

"You are always nobly generous."

George smiled gravely in acknowledgment of this kind compliment, and continued his narration.

"You will be much surprised when I tell you that the unfortunate lady I was happily enabled to succor was the widow of poor Mr. Lionel, and, having met with sad reverses, was hoping to obtain some engagement as companion in a select household, but first had dragged herself hither for one glance at the old home, not seen for twelve years; perhaps with the half hope of seeing her guardian, from whom, as you know, she was severed by her marriage."

"Yes; how strange a circumstance! I little thought you were going to tell me this! I remember both herself and Mr. Lionel well; so affable with every one, they were much beloved."

"By all the tenantry. With shrinking delicacy, she explained how averse she was to accepting my offer, yet how thankful she would feel for some such shelter for a time. I pressed it upon her, entreating that she would not hesitate to accept so slight a service, which would be opportune; for she was overcome by trouble, fasting, and fatigue, and totally unfitted to be out-of-doors. For her little girl's sake, I begged she would pause no longer, and I reminded her how often Mr. Travers had befriended ourselves, and especially had used his interest and influence in procuring me the situation I at present hold."

"Yes; and she allowed you to see her to the farm?"

"She told me first how broken were her fortunes, how inadequate her power to return the kindness offered; upon which I would not hear a word, but tendered her my arm, begging she would lean upon me while I supported her to our house. She did so; and when we arrived there, my dear mother, with her accustomed genial hospitality and tender thoughtfulness, at once bestirred herself to see to the invalid's comfort, putting her to bed there and then, and making her those tempting and nourishing dishes which seem native to a farm-house, but which dear mother improves upon with a nicety all her own. And now tell me, oh, fairest of fair judges! Did I well?"

Thus abruptly and flatteringly denominated critic, Gabrielle did not pause in her reply:

"Most certainly you did; I should have done the same."

"Thanks, dear; I am sure you would."

"I had no idea you were so well occupied all the time. I dreamed you were idling away the hours in those delicious meadows, or in the garden with your book, indolent as the honey-laden bees."

Spite of the pleasant words, there was a vein of sadness, and he looked at the face narrowly while asking,

"And my Gabrielle is not the least little bit jealous?"

"Not the least little bit!"—the face with the honest eyes meeting his, and the lips pressed firm below.

"The lady in whom we were so interested remained at our house a fortnight, winning our sincere respect—so gentle, so thankful for every little service, it was a real pleasure having her about us—and she picked up wonderfully, seeming to regain strength by our very kindness. And how shall I describe her child to you? The counterpart of her beautiful mother, with a passionate love, an exquisite tenderness, in all her relations with that idolized parent. Mrs. Travers and myself had many quiet conversations together about her little one, and she told me of traits so delicate, my love for children has increased tenfold."

"I am sorry for it."

He looked up surprised, and she explained.

"I am afraid you will one day become too fond of these little friends of yours, dear George! Believe me, I but speak in your own interest. It is so easy to centre the full love of a heart upon some object, especially if it appears to return that love; but it is another matter possessing the power of withdrawing the love at will. I mean in the event of that return love changing; and childhood is fickle, veering with the wind, and loving most where gaining most, and often only so long as that gain continues."

"It is seldom my gentle cousin expresses herself so warmly."

"It is because I hope never to see your happiness dependent upon any thing so uncertain, and because, knowing you better than any living person knows you, I am aware how soon one of these would twine about your heart, and how soon that heart would feel the slightest change—a change certain to ensue. Do you think me bold? How often have I talked in confidence, and never once but with the highest regard for your welfare!"

"I know it, Gabrielle. You may be sure I would not have taken you into confidence now unless I were well assured of your pure unselfishness. I admit it would give me sincere pleasure to have Mrs. Travers's little girl here with us, for, as you have probably surmised, she is now an inmate of my mother's home; hence my disinclination to advise the going thither of your young friend. I was unwilling to increase the pressure upon their kindness, since it is to oblige myself they have her there, and I was also unwilling the children should be thrown together."

Gabrielle was about to say that, had he but told her in the beginning, she could have made this right; but she remembered she had not told him of that one little matter relative to "Walter's" disguise; so she said instead,

"You have yet to tell me of Mrs. Travers, and how she came to allow her little girl to stay."

"It was a sore struggle. The poor lady was resolved upon obtaining some situation whereby to earn money; her intention was to take lodgings for her child somewhere near, so that she might see her occasionally—as often as practicable; but when I represented the peril to the child involved in the arrangement, as there certainly would have been, and submitted the advantages derivable from a quiet country home and pure country air, she admitted the justice of the plea, and saw with me it was more in the interest of her child's health to allow her to remain, even if deprived of the joy of so frequently seeing her."

"Yes," said Gabrielle, thoughtfully, looking in the fire that snapped and crackled, as if enjoying some excellent, albeit vexing, life-problem.

"And I offered to make this my business, if she would permit me, and to be at entire cost—not a very large one—of the maintenance of her little girl, at my own home or elsewhere, both myself and herself to see the child as often as convenient."

Gabrielle drew a deep breath.

"And this kind offer was of course accepted?"

"Yes, very gratefully; without any nonsense, and upon the understanding that any expenditure thus involved should be returned to me so soon as Mrs. Travers was in a position to do so."

"Well, it is a novel responsibility for you—one long wished for. I hope it may give you every pleasure!"

She did wish it, for his happiness was dearer to her than her own.

He smiled in a dissatisfied manner.

"It is but a half possession. The child is too fond of her mother to spare a grain of fondness for any one else; and were Mrs. Travers to become wealthy, her little girl would be removed from my care without compunction—"

"Of course, and very properly; and just as you were beginning to love the child; remember my warning. It is one of those pitfalls good people make for themselves."

What a flush the flaring blaze in the grate lent to the usually faint-hued cheeks!

"Hence I am acting very prudently, and as foreseeing all you would represent, in not going home, as I might do, say each Saturday afternoon."

"But how about the prudence, when wishing for the danger to enter this very house?"

"True, Gabrielle; a mere passing thought; a scarcely defined dream of what might be."

"But what is the utility of a realized 'might be' if destined inevitably to lead up to sharp and certain pain? Better live on the 'might be' forever and forever."

She was very serious now, and George Percival knew himself confronted by a woman awake to hard and bitter truth, to the hardest and most bitter truth a woman learns, when discovering all a life's hopes are futile, all a love's life is dead. She did not exhibit her distress, nor convey by a single moan all the bitterness. She simply realized it and accepted it.

"George dear"—he looked up, he had never in all his life heard her speak to him so softly—"I am so glad you have told me of all this; I may be able to help you. Believe me, I will do my best to teach her *how* to love you."

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CHAPTER XLIV.

A QUIET CHAT.

It was said with a sweetness that never varied, and a firmness leaving no second thought of its truth. And he was quite taken aback, being unprepared for this generous and unselfish interest.

There would, then, be something indeed to hurry home from the City for, and without envious glancing into those red-curtained rooms he passed upon the transit. *His* room should become exquisite by the light lent by that one small sunny face. And Queen Street—barren avenue—should blossom as the rose. For the first time in his life it would be a place of charms, so great was the transformation to be effected.

With Gabrielle for helper, what might not be done!

George had never particularly loved the street the worthy book-seller had retired to; its quietness was oppressive, for to him the Prophet Zechariah's description was dear: "*And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.*" George Percival was an eminently domestic and home-loving person; his evenings were spent at home, and it was his world. There had seemed to be something wanting, but he had hitherto been contented with those hazy idyllic dreamings which now appeared nearer the form and semblance of reality than ever before. Involuntarily his thought wandered in the direction of one of his clerks, a wholly inadequate creature to whom the manager had been very kind, for the simple reason (a sufficient one with George Percival) that he had a child dependent upon him; and "I will try and have Andrew Wilson's salary raised for this," he said to himself. In such odd manner does the gratitude of a heart find vent!

It was a painful satisfaction Gabrielle experienced upon that evening; her cousin looked so much happier, and she sadly thought, "Why had *I* not the power to brighten his life and kindle those beautiful smiles?" And then with a second thought came the consciousness that she had done so, and she was contented.

She turned the channel of their thought by handing him a book her father had that morning brought in. Mr. Percival, senior, making a point of obtaining through his old publishing friends the notable books of the day.

"What is this? *The Triumph of Seasons*, by the Rev. Westley Garland. I have read reviews upon it; opinion seems varied."

"There need be no second opinion upon its merit," said Gabrielle, with the generosity of a true woman.

"I will read it. I am an admirer of several of his works; and I have often thought if there was one man more than another I should like to know, it is Westley Garland."

"Well, it is useless wishing any vain wish of the kind. I expect Mr. Garland is one of those stars whose beams reach us from the highest distance."

"I should place this work," said George, minutely looking through the volume, "among the author's poetical productions. Some prose works are not to be rated by the canons which govern prose."

"Like your own books, which are more distinctively poetic."

"I am no poet, nor do I wish to be; it signifies to suffer. My nature is susceptible enough without the higher-strung discipline. When I have felt myself drifting thitherward, I have rather checked the course, thinking it unfits me for the world of facts and figures; when I give myself to this, it will be after quitting the arena of matter-of-fact. Even this hobby about little Ella partakes too much of the poetic, and, judging by all my past experience, I shall be called to account in some rough form. I always find something to dispel illusions: and I never yet yielded to an affection for a particular child but it was taken from me."

"Not a very encouraging retrospect, just entering upon your experiment; be careful. I do not, however, see why to enjoy the poetic should represent 'to suffer.'"

"Plant an æolian harp upon a hill in gusty March, and note the effect upon that sensitive instrument. Truly the poet thinks, studies, writes for the future, and lives for others rather than himself. If conscientious, he is the most unselfish worker in the world. Prosperity may come or go, it has no bearing upon his work. The bias of opinion in no degree affects the execution of that upon which he expends his soul. He may be unrecognized, unknown for years, and then his audience may be the scantiest ever grouped to hear a singer; but he will sing on, in the dark, it may be, but very sweetly, and with the earnest faith and simple affection which soul-work ever imparts to the steadfast in heart."

She had ceased to work, and was looking upon his face, listening eagerly.

"The soul of the man or woman constituted poetically is, by the fineness of organization, peculiarly susceptible to mental enthusiasm, and all the emotional influences thrilling the heart with ecstasy; it is, as it were, stretched to greatest tension upon bars of music, rendering it dangerously sensitive to impressions which may at any moment shake fragile beings like reeds."

"Beauty, for instance?"

"There are times when beauty itself becomes a snare, and idealism a decoy to evil. With the laudable desire to win good opinions on one side, and to maintain an independent judgment on the other, it is no easy matter to avoid becoming rather the idealist of the flesh than of the spirit. Yet, as we know, in our own day this has been accomplished by more than one poet; by aid of their faith, in virtue of a devotion that never wavers—the faith, say, a severe reverence for the antique, the devotion, an intense love of the Greek; a belief persistently followed all through, a creed strengthened by years, the wider their sympathy with the classical."

"You treat the classical with becoming honor."

"It is the mother of culture."

"And you would go into raptures, I suppose, before one of the marbles of Athens?"

"Not at all. I prefer some pretty child of today, in whom I discover more perfection of beauty. It is rather her learning I allude to."

"And taste."

"Yes, and taste; in comparison with which the quintessence of Modernism is dissatisfying."

"And you hold those poets to be the most perfect who approach nearest to the spirit of the Greek?"

"The most perfect upon purely finished style and august elegance, not upon those grounds affecting our common humanity. One of these poets is no use to me for lifting my trouble-laden soul, or pointing out the direction where comfort is to be found. I shall gather more from some few sentences of some writer intensely human—say, for instance, our friend Mr. Garland here—than from a whole epic of the Attic school. But I shall there learn a sublimity of thought which will confer innate nobility, by reason that it is the very highest form of scholarship." He paused, but she did not reply, and he proceeded with the argument. "These poets recognize no bridge between the Present and the Attic; the periods are identical. If departure occurs in particular cases, under stress of illustration, it is to be in the company of at once the most perfect and the most beautiful of the masters of thought. The secret of their finished power is sympathy, as it is the secret of every true poet; in this case, sympathy with the classical. Sympathy appears to me the essence of sublimity, both in music and poetry. The measure of poetry is its depth—depth of emotion, not meaning; when it beats with a heart, breathes with a life, throbs with the tenderness of a soul: this is the emotional depth of poetry: by this, with this, for this, it lives and loves and suffers; pines through long waste of years; droops, sun-scorched and wind-blown, hidden in the valley; waits hopefully the issue of a hundred days of doubt, ofttimes faints low even to the borderland, but never dies; for its vitality is established upon the basis which gives vitality to the soul, and the soul becomes poetry, and poetry becomes soul, and the soul can not die."

Yes, she understood all this, and the gleaming light upon her face was its witness; she thought the words might almost have proceeded from her own lips.

"The abstract," he continued, "should have no abiding-place in poetry; it is an utterance in no case submitting to strained effect. For is it not the language of music which suffers by contraction, the melody sinking to broken shreds of unlovely sound, intense, yet void of sympathy? It exalts as god the Intellect, and the heart may but kiss its skirts, banished to the utter confines of the circle where Mind preaches in the midst. Yet even as there is more of prose in this day of work than of poem-feeling, or tenderness of instinct, so many find comfort in the letter who fail to find the love. Some are so ground down by care and voiced to common tones of daily life, the poet's message is one of discordance in place of sweetness, and the exquisiteness of high metrical emotion is a trouble, and is apprehensively shunned. To such the light of the lofty purpose is lost, and the inner mission is negative. They count his days spent in folly, and good strength wasted upon shadows. But the man sings on, not regarding the heedless. What bird stays the wild woodland trill because there are few or none to listen? It can not help but sing: and little it knows of wanderers pausing by reason of the spell of its song, which lifts the heart upward, cheers the step forward, reveals glimpses of a bright beyond, and sends them on their way stronger and with a braver courage. I do assure you often, when terribly low, I have revived under some such influence; and when ground down utterly, as it seemed, and altogether oppressed by the routine of City work, some fragment of this higher language has lifted my soul from dead and colorless grooves."

"I am sure of it. Sometimes I have wondered how it is you can keep at it day by day with the punctuality and regularity of mere mechanical clerkship."

"Why do hundreds, who feel as I do, and who abhor the grinding blankness of the life? It is for the money earned, the position gained; it is because respectability requires a man to possess some tangible proof representing some certain source of income, and because a man without it is but three removes from a vagabond—by the focus of respectability. What do you think I should be worth in the estimation of genteel folk, supposing I lost my position at the bank? Very little, I trow."

"Well, we won't talk about that."

"No, we won't talk about that, although I have sometimes felt that if a sixteenth of my present salary was derivable from literature it would be ten times as sweet."

"And yet your position is an honorable and an honored one, and you have worked hard to make it so. Listen! There is the postman. He is coming here."

The maid entered with a black-edged note for George, which he read aloud, as follows:

"My dear Friend,—I have been unable to write you before, owing, I am sorry to say, to the bustle of preparation for leaving home. Immediately upon my arrival, I discovered it was as an occasional travelling companion my services would be required. I do not feel justified in resigning the position I hold, since every member of the family treats me with extreme kindness and consideration. It is, nevertheless, a grief to me (thus being compelled to quit England) on account of my dear little one; but I have at least the consolation of knowing she could not be in kinder hands; and as I would commend her to the thoughtful protection of a father, I leave her in your charge, praying God may bless and reward you for all your kind sympathy and care. This is merely a visit of a week or two by the Misses Vivian to their mamma, now resident in Nice; thus I am hoping my absence may be of very short duration. Meanwhile, believe me, with very grateful recollections, your friend, ELLA TRAVERS."

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CHAPTER XLV.

IN THE BANK PARLOR.

ANDREW WILSON, the clerk of whom mention has been made, knew perfectly well how much he was indebted to the manager, and daily trembled lest the errors he made by the score should be discovered by somebody else. Of a truth, the discrepancies and inaccuracies of his factotum took up a considerable portion of Mr. Percival's time. Not wishing it to be known that he connived at so inadequate a system of service, he used to go carefully through Wilson's work after the gentlemen of the bank had left the establishment. The manager knew to a certainty that his clerk would never obtain another similar position; hence his patience. And he was marvelously tolerant with the poor old scribe.

He was sitting late one evening, in the bank parlor, checking Andrew Wilson's figures, when Mr. Stephen Miles stealthily returned, in company with Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., one of the directors. This gentleman had once published a book, which had been a distinguished failure; he therefore entertained unmitigated contempt for this mere salaried manager, who dared to bring out successful books under the very nose of himself, autocrat of the London and Olympian. Stephen Miles, with unerring scent, detecting a hitch somewhere, improved upon it, and by crafty and subtle device fanned the fire of the director's jealous annoyance. And Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., lent but too ready an ear to the poison-whispering, and bided his time. Stephen Miles, who aspired to the managership, lost no opportunity, when alone with his superior, of disparaging Percival and his attainments. He was (not that it was any business of his) abstracted at the work, evidently engaging in his duties mechanically, and not with due regard to the interests of the firm. "A man can not serve two masters," said Stephen, devoutly, as implying that the master Mr. Percival served was decidedly not Mammon. He was sorry to allude to such a thing in Mr. Gripper's presence, for Percival had a mother (the lizard-green pocket-handkerchief here came into play), but he feared—and he had observed him very closely—he feared Mr. Percival was not the conscientious and high-principled young man the directors supposed. It grieved him more than words could convey to express this opinion of a superior, but integrity was every thing with him, and he would not be true to his integrity if he kept it back any longer. He had passed many sleepless nights thinking this over since seeing some little things he did not quite like in Mr. Percival's transaction of the bank business, and it was long before he could make up his mind to draw attention to this, knowing the confidence reposed in the manager, and aware that such, coming from a subordinate, bore appearance of being dictated selfishly; but he deemed it his duty, his bounden duty, as a faithful servant, to direct Mr. Gripper's notice to this "something" which was making him so uncomfortable; and he had done so.

And the director gave this faithful servant his hard hand gratefully, with,

"You have done the bank good service, Mr. Miles; we will see into this."

Thus encouraged, the faithful servant explained more particularly the nature of his doubts. He did not know, mind, but terribly feared all the accounts passing through Mr. Percival's hands were not quite accurate. He was in the habit of sitting at the books long after clerks and cashiers had left the premises—that looked bad. He (Mr. Miles) entertained strong distaste for the mysterious and underhanded. In business every thing must be open and above-board to please him, or he would have none of it. If Mr. Percival found the pressure of the work too heavy for transacting within the reasonable hours apportioned to business, there was no objection to his working later, but at least he might have one of the juniors to assist him. It was the stealthiness—he was sorry to use the word, but couldn't think of another—that he did not like; he did so hold with actions being open to the inspection of all the world.

Mr. Gripper quite believed in Mr. Miles, but felt astonishingly discommoded when the awful roll of the eyes came into operation; and being himself a keen man of business, with particular regard to honesty of purpose, he quite commended the sentiments of this valued adviser; and when Mr. Miles proposed that he should take the manager unawares one afternoon, and see what he really was up to, Mr. Gripper thought it his bounden duty to the London and Olympian to do so. And they did so. They came in quietly by means of a private key, and stood in the passage outside the first door of those doubling the entrance to the bank parlor. Mr. Miles was to keep in the background; he begged his name should not be brought into question, and the other agreed. Mr. Gripper entered softly, and confronted the manager before he had time to blot the balance of an account he was examining; but this did not confuse the industrious accountant; far from it. He rose and bowed respectfully, waiting. He supposed this call to have reference to one of the bank customers.

"At work late, Mr. Percival?" said the member of the firm, taking a seat, and folding the tails of his long coat over each knee, as though to keep them warm.

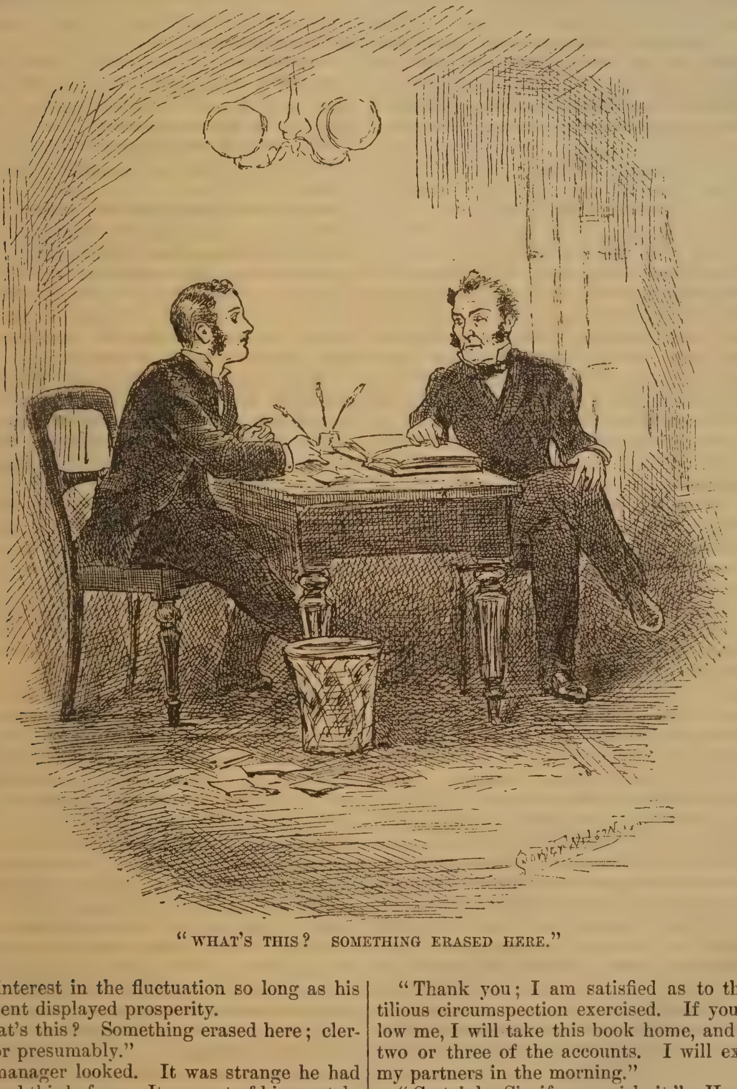
"There is always something needs attention, Sir, after closing. I prefer every thing straight before locking up."

"Thank you; very right." He rose, standing over the book, glancing down like a hawk, his thumb on the page heavy as a government seal, and asked, "Any thing wrong with this account?" reckoning the whole thing in a flash, and observing it correct.

"Nothing, Sir. I have rectified an error I detected, dated the 26th."

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., drew a chair up to the table, and pulled the book over to him, remarking, "Money is down again, I see by the evening paper."

"Indeed, Sir." The manager did not take particular interest in the fluctuation so long as his department displayed prosperity.



"WHAT'S THIS? SOMETHING ERASED HERE."

"What's this? Something erased here; clerical error presumably."

The manager looked. It was strange he had not noticed this before. It was not of his scratching out, and he had gone over the page only three evenings previously, signing it correct. His signature was there just below it. He could not understand it, and said so.

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., held his head up very high, looked down the sharpness of his nose, turned over a page or two, and detected a place where figures had been substituted for others. He covered the page above and below the alteration with blotting-paper, remarking carelessly upon the neatness with which the accounts were kept, then politely requested Mr. Percival would look at that page a moment. Were those his figures? To which George unhesitatingly answered, "Yes," so close was the forgery.

"Have you found occasion for many alterations in the books, Sir?"

"I have invariably done so where I have detected clerical errors on the part of the clerks."

"Thank you; I am satisfied as to the punctilious circumspection exercised. If you will allow me, I will take this book home, and balance two or three of the accounts. I will explain to my partners in the morning."

"Certainly, Sir, if you wish it." He tied the book up in brown paper, and offered to leave it at Mr. Gripper's house in the course of the evening.

"I will take it myself; I am obliged to you. Trying evening this for any one queer about the chest."

He was buttoning the ends of his muffler inside his thick brown coat, Mrs. Rehoboam Gripper being monstrously particular with this invaluable member of Society. As Mrs. Gripper observed to her eldest daughter, Miss Cornelia Gripper, "Your papa is not only a private gentleman, my love, he is also a banker; and for the sake of those intrusting their little all to his keeping, we should take the utmost precaution lest he catches cold." And they did so.

The Gripper household was conducted upon model principles of precaution. Mrs. Gripper was the daughter of a civil engineer, and the precautionary organs of the skilled constructor were fully developed in this careful lady. Mr. Gripper's precautionary measures took a different form, being closely allied with the preservation of treasure. Miss Gripper took upon herself the management of the establishment, and it was a continuous struggle with that estimable lady lest one or other of the servants transgressed wastefully. Miss Miranda Gripper, on the contrary (Miss Miranda was the second daughter), confined her cautiousness to foreign departments, such as the trades-people, with whom they dealt; "a designing set," Miss Miranda said, "who would get the better of you if they could;" she likewise displayed wariness with their friends and acquaintances at whose houses they visited, expressing habitual distrust regarding their genuineness and sincerity, and sometimes their solvency. Miss Lydia, the third daughter, displayed vigilance in respect to the opposite sex, fencing and hedging herself in from some ever-impending attack, although the necessity was not imminent. Taken in its entirety, the household to which the buttoned-up and muffled banker proceeded, and conveyed the brown paper parcel under his arm, was an eminently precautionary one.

After Mr. Gripper had gone, the manager, although untroubled because he knew the accounts to be balanced accurately, sat rather perplexed, musing over that particular alteration Mr. Gripper had pointed out, and which he could not remember at the time of his attestation. When could he have altered the particular figures there standing? And why should Mr. Gripper so carefully cover the page when asking him respecting them? Mr. Percival sat ruminating, hoping all was right, and but little disturbed by the occurrence. He experienced great sympathy for Andrew Wilson, who had seen better days. True, Mr. Percival knew, but did not acquaint others with his knowledge, that the old gentleman, who was a skilled performer upon the violin, had served in the orchestra of a theatre; but this was preferable to many of the shifts the needy resort to, George thought, and should certainly not debar him from obtaining some higher form of employment. The day the musician came before the manager in this same parlor, he told that kind-hearted humanitarian the story of his past, and it was a story of superior fortunes and of education, as well as of sorrow and wrong, and Percival gave him his hand, with the promise to do his best to assist him. And he kept his promise. He believed the clerk, if he once got into the way required, would prove more valuable than some of the younger men with considerable jewelry and large assurance. And rather than the meek and grateful fellow should be ignominiously discharged, he would continue rectifying his mistakes, questionable though the policy might be. But he could not somehow remember Wilson having made a mistake at the particular line Mr. Gripper had pointed out, and he was puzzled; not in the least troubled, but decidedly puzzled. Amidst his ruminating there came a tap at the door, a gentle tap that only small hands make, and, with a pleased smile, the gentleman bade the intruder enter. It was merely the daughter of the bank housekeeper, but she came in with an evident purpose. Mr. Percival had been kind to the child, and even as he won love of all such, the little girl remembered him, when absent, more fondly than he suspected. But now she came in to say this to him, and it set him thinking:

"I thought, perhaps, you did not know, Sir, that Mr. Miles came in with Mr. Gripper; they came in very softly and stood whispering in the passage. I was on the stairs."

"Thank you, my child, it is all right; no doubt Mr. Miles returned for something he had forgotten."

"He has often been back before, Sir; just asked if you were here, and gone away again."

"Oh, Miles is a good fellow enough. I have no doubt there was some cause for his return."

He had broken bread with the man; it was not easy for George Percival to entertain distrust; he was not of the order of those who distrust all with whom they break bread.

"Mother doesn't believe in Mr. Miles," replied the child, with simplicity, not stopping to think that it was really no business of her mother's. Intent upon speaking her thoughts truthfully, she had honestly expressed her opinion in the earnestness of her interest.

And when she had gone, and George had locked up, and turned into the chilly street, he felt a dim mysterious presentiment not to be accounted for, not to be reasoned away, which, visiting some, produces discomfort and depression.

"Now," said George to himself, "I ought not to be feeling like this; I suppose it's the weather." That poor weather, how it is saddled with grievances all the year round! And as, when he felt one of his low moods creeping upon him, he always thought enviously of those with a family to take it off, so now his mind pictured little Ella watching his mother knitting beside the huge fire-place in the parlor at the farm, pictured his father with the evening pipe and the county paper, often laying aside his glasses to look at the fairy picture beside him; Wallace, George's old hound, which he could not keep in town, would be asleep before the fire, and Ella would often stoop to fondle her shaggy friend. A mere country picture, but it was very sweet to him upon that chilly and uncomfortable evening; for there was home, his mother, and a child, and George Percival could not realize any combination more exquisite than that. And he was delighting himself with this fancy when—he found himself face to face with a tall, thin being, who, turning the corner with the expedition of a harlequin, was brought to a stand-still by this thoughtful man plodding homeward.

"Bless my soul—opposite neighbor—happy to cross paths with you, Sir—charming evening—pressed for time now, but we shall meet again. Adieu!" And like harlequin still, an unearthly, cadaverous, sardonic sort of harlequin, he flitted down the street.

CHAPTER XLVI.

DISMISSED!

"Thus, gentlemen, there is evident defalcation; but I am sure I re-echo the sentiments of my esteemed partners in saying we do *not* wish to press a criminal prosecution; that we shall combine mercy with justice in simply dismissing George Percival without a character. We are displaying a leniency he has little right to expect, but which, as directors of the London and Olympian, we feel we can afford to exercise."

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., was speaking at an extraordinary meeting of the directors, convened to consider the case of Percival, manager, detected, it was said, in tampering with the books for fraudulent purposes. Gripper, Esq., made out his case so convincingly to his partners that, with all their faith in and respect for George, they were staggered. Yet not one of them but pitied him. Gripper, Esq., knew this very well, knew his partners would never assent to a prosecution in a criminal court; and hence his magnanimous flourish of mercy.

The assembly was met in the long room used by the firm above the bank, to consider how they ought to act, and the senior partner rose to reply. It was a white-haired old gentleman of benevolent features and mildly authoritative manners, who evidently felt keenly the unfortunate position in which their *employé* had placed himself.

"Our friend Mr. Gripper very reasonably sets forth the unpleasant nature of this distressing occurrence. I have been so long connected with the bank, indeed, I may say almost from its foundation, and in all that period, I am happy to say, we have had no dishonest clerk. This altogether exceptional affair is therefore most painful, and I am exceedingly shocked the London and Olympian should have been subjected to this sort of thing, so particularly careful as we have always been in our selection of the gentlemen in our employ, and so exacting in the matter of their introductory references, testimonials, antecedents, and securities. I am grieved beyond measure that a young man like Mr. Percival—recommended to us by a gentleman of position, as we must certainly admit Mr. Beresford Travers to be—should have thus forgotten the obligations due to Society, to his patron, and to us."

The speaker paused, his partners looking grieved, while the susceptible Gripper, Esq., appeared much affected. The senior partner resumed:

"You will allow me to say I commend the charitable course our friend Mr. Gripper kindly proposes; dismissal is imperative, since our confidence is abused, and in justice to other firms we can not, I am sorry to say, permit George Percival to leave our service with—with a character, that is—of course I mean—with the—with the character of an honest and truthful young man."

The old gentleman was very flustered; this was an embarrassing and distasteful office, and he had spoken with candor when saying that, as the senior partner in the London and Olympian, he was much shocked.

Another partner, with some hesitation, ventured an opinion, he thought Mr. Percival should be allowed an opportunity of clearing himself.

A third partner thought it most inconsistent to admit extenuation, by circumstance or influence, in so extreme a case, and he felt it incumbent upon him to indorse Mr. Gripper's motion, and to suggest summary dismissal; further, he was of opinion George Percival should think himself highly favored at thus getting off scot-free.

A fourth discerned that, being the manager, in such a very responsible position, the offense was all the more heinous, and he trusted Percival's half-year's salary due in December would not be admitted.

"But how is the poor fellow to live," asked the more benevolent senior partner, "deprived of his wage and destitute of references?"

"And how," replied the other, with a somewhat sarcastic query, "does Mr. Percival think banks are to continue solvent if managers appropriate profits at discretion? Money is at this time the worst of all commodities by means of which to live, and if reduced by a system of illegitimate credit, it will be perfectly valueless. Have Percival in, hear what he has to say, and let it be settled one way or another, for I have an important engagement that must not be broken."

Percival was called in; he entered bowing respectfully, and looking more cheerful than he had for months. It was the morning following upon that memorable evening of the conversation with Gabrielle. He felt a little surprised at the gloomy looks around the board, and at the coldness which acknowledged his greeting; but beyond this he experienced no astonishment.

Upon the senior partner devolved the disagreeable office of addressing the culprit.

"Good-morning, Mr. Percival. I have an unpleasant duty to perform, I assure you, but a necessary one, and in the interests of that rightful principle which it is our inherent duty as honest men and good Christians to observe, I must not shrink from its performance. It is my painful duty to inform you that our books have been tampered with, and there is serious defalcation in the accounts. We are so placed we can arrive at no other conclusion than that you have betrayed your trust, and we are compelled to charge you with embezzlement—"

"Good heavens! Gentlemen, what is this? *You* charge *me* with *embezzlement!* I am dreaming, surely."

It was so emphatically the speech and the action of an innocent man, the dazed and bewildered look was so utter upon his ghastly face (for the shock was so intense, so unexpected), he might have relied upon this alone, without a word, had he but the senior partner to deal with; there were others, however, whose grim, stern aspect convinced him it was any thing but a dream in their view.

Then the senior partner said, with a touch of kindness in his voice:

"Cast your eye over these erasures and false additions, Sir, and account for them. If you can do so in some way different to that we have concluded, believe me, we shall be *very* glad."

But Mr. Percival stood upon his dignity. It was nothing that required casting the eye over the book for in his opinion; and he declined lending himself even to recognize their suspicion of himself.

"No, gentlemen," he replied, sadly, yet composed now, "it is quite unnecessary. If you can lay this grave crime to my charge, it is so unjustifiable and unaccountable, I refuse to look at any writings in that book not my own—"

"But how can you tell whether they are your own or not if you don't look?"

"Because, Sir, you but just now stated the additions to be false. Whenever I have erased any figures, it has been for the purpose of making the accounts *accurate.*"

In his heart the senior partner approved the argument, although experiencing surprise at the lofty stand-point taken by the accused, who, according to his old school of ethics, should have been prostrated and suing for mercy.

"You would not surely say, Mr. Percival, that any one else has been tampering with these entries?"

"I most certainly should, Sir, if the entries have been tampered with, for of a truth it is not I who have to answer for that dastardly trick."

"But only yourself and Mr. Gripper have had access to this ledger, which, as you know, is kept, or should be kept, with the account-books in the private safe."

"I will not say it is Mr. Gripper—I am more discriminate than yourselves in my charges against people; but I do most unhesitatingly say it is not I. There is evidently some most astonishing mistake in the whole affair."

"I should think so," muttered Mr. Gripper, sourly.

"No mistake at all, Percival," said the fourth partner, who was in a hurry to be off; "the whole thing is extremely simple, and lies in a nutshell, an extremely tight nutshell, I think you will find. Figures in our books have been altered, detection of which arousing our suspicions—not of you, but of something being wrong—we examine the accounts, and we find the altered figures show a deficiency of £400. Yourself being alone empowered to touch either these books or the private cash, we can come to no other conclusion than that you have heard, which, instead of disproving, you refute with well-assumed indignation, which, I am sorry to say, is less straightforward than open and manly confession."

Mr. Percival brought his hand down heavily upon the table, and stood face to face with the board, at bay, strong and reliant in his honesty.

"Would you have me confess to a thing my whole soul would revolt at, and the mention of which is loathsome? No, Sirs! Had I the cur-like infamy to act as I have been charged, I could most certainly confess or do any mortal thing; but never so long as I am clear to myself and to my God. As to my fellow-man, that, upon second thought, is of little moment."

Mr. Gripper rose: he wore so strangely kind and plausible an aspect, it appeared as though he was about to use some representation in favor of a more charitable course. No; Mr. Gripper simply put a question or two.

"We will credit your appreciation of truth, Percival, and perhaps you will inform the meeting what may be the qualities of the clerk named Andrew Wilson?"

"The question is scarcely definite enough, Sir. May I ask if you mean as regards *character* or business qualifications."

"I said clerk, Sir, which, of course, means business," answered the antagonist, surlily, nettled by the other's coolness.

"Andrew Wilson is not so quick or correct as a younger man would be, but he is thoroughly conscientious, and works with willingness to the best of his ability; remember he is only paid half what the juniors are getting."

"Nothing to do with it; the London and Olympian is not a refuge for superannuated clerks. We require men we can depend upon, and men we can trust."

"Precisely," remarked a director at one of the corners, but as he was cross-eyed, it was impossible to tell which way he was looking, and the speaker even was matter of doubt.

"Will you tell us," continued Mr. Gripper, "whether you have or whether you have not systematically aided this man, Andrew Wilson, at blundering over his work?"

"Again I do not understand your question."

"Have you not, upon more than one occasion, saved this man from the just desert now about to befall yourself—dismissal from the firm? A man whose only value in the world, so far as I can ascertain, seems to be a taste or talent for violin-playing; a pretty qualification, truly, for a bank! I should like to know what business he had to be taken on?"

"That, Sir (when I had the pleasure of serving you as manager), was distinctly my business. I took Mr. Wilson on because he is an educated man, and to a large extent competent to carry out the duties required. He has known great sorrows, but has preserved his respectability; he was eager for a situation of the kind, and I gave him the trial. I was very pleased with his gentlemanly bearing, his simple endeavors to give satisfaction, his persevering efforts, and his uniform integrity, and I kept him on, convinced he would in time succeed in doing work that would bear comparison with the best. I may be permitted to hope you will not turn him off through any misunderstanding with myself."

In reply, Mr. Gripper looked round the faces at the table, and, reading approval, touched a gong.

"It will be more satisfactory, a great deal, if you take your friend along with you; there will thus be opportunity for your continuing your partnership."

"Mr. Gripper," interrupted the senior partner, mildly, "I think it is unnecessary to indulge in any more of these reproaches."

"Certainly, Sir;" and Gripper, Esq., bowed jerkily.

The bank page appeared. "Send Mr. Wilson up." And Gripper, Esq., looked thoughtful, for there was a light in George Percival's eyes he did not like.

"If he meets me in the lane by my house one of these winter nights, ten to one but he punches my head, garrotes me, or some fine thing or other. I must be careful."

Like all bullies, Gripper, Esq., was an arrant coward.

The page opened the door, and Andrew Wilson walked in. He looked pale; the unfortunate soon perceive a change. There was an air of sober, broken-down gentility about the man. They had not observed it before; but now, while he stood trembling there before them, while they curiously examined the individual Percival had so chivalrously protected, they did notice a something that bespoke refinement. Although, thanks to his good friend, many degrees higher in the social scale than when dependent upon the orchestral work of the theatre, he yet presented a decidedly needy appearance.

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., cleared his throat and looked aslant at the quivering, trembling old man.

"Good-morning, Andrew Wilson. We have sent for you under unpleasant circumstances, not being satisfied with the performance of your duties. Be good enough to make out your account up to twelve o'clock, and hand it to the cashier."

The old man's head drooped; he leaned heavily on the back of a chair; he could not say any thing. This grim gathering of moneyed men, who could take on and dismiss whole hosts like himself, overawed him; he felt unable to utter a simple word in reply. He heard a quick footstep, knew a manly tread was approaching him, felt his hand grasped cordially, and, looking up, saw through a mist, as it were, the kind face, even as the face of a son, that, next to his child, was dearer than all else.

"Never mind, old friend, I will not lose sight of you."

"Just what I said," Mr. Gripper intruded. "Tarred with the same brush, they'll stick together; but next time won't get off quite so easily, I'll be bound!"

"Will—you—explain—your—meaning, Sir?" asked George Percival, indignantly.

"Yes, I will, Sir," answered the other, with aggravating asperity. "It is that the next employers you rob will send you to jail without sitting half an hour under your impudence."

"Hear! hear!" from the man who was in a hurry to be off.

George bit his lip. The control displayed throughout the interview bore witness to the fine Saxon character. It was the man who had been all trembling and crushed who was galvanized to life and energy by the insults heaped upon his friend.

"A lie!" he burst out—"a black and monstrous lie!"

"Mercy on us!" cried the old gentleman, in a plaintive, shrill little voice; "a scene, a quarrel, in the bank board-room! Gentlemen, I rise to order." And, much scandalized, the senior partner of the London and Olympian rose, holding a hand up with deprecatory appeal. It presented a white palm, which served for flag of truce; hostilities ceased, and there was a calm; following upon which Mr. Percival courteously spoke:

"I think this unpleasant discussion need not be prolonged, gentlemen; it does not seem as though it would lead to an understanding. I have a balance of £425 to my account with the bank. I will, if you please, draw £25, and leave the £400—the amount laid to my charge as deducted from the private treasury—until this mystery is cleared up. I have no doubt but that I shall receive it before long; but failing your ever being perfectly satisfied as to my innocence, I will forfeit the amount altogether."

The senior partner bowed. "I think it but right, Mr. Percival, to say that we have been talking it over, and feel we can not give a testimonial as to your trustworthiness, and my telling you this now will spare the annoyance of a refusal."

"I should not so far forget myself, Sir, as to refer any firm to one that had used me as you have done." And without more ado, bowing coldly, Percival opened the door, held it with kind attention until Andrew Wilson walked through, and then went out, closing it softly behind him.

"Cheeky!" muttered the man who was in a hurry to be off, to Gripper, Esq. "And I should think a good clear out."

Mr. Gripper then rose, and waiting until the hum of conversation had subsided, said, "I rise to propose, gentlemen, that Mr. Stephen Miles be appointed manager, in the place of George Percival, dismissed. We have had convincing proof of his usefulness and merit as a servant of the bank, of his skilled proficiency as a chief clerk, and of his probity and rectitude. I think we could not make a wiser choice; I am sure the affairs of the bank will prosper in the hands of Mr. Miles. Of course this is merely a suggestion; you, gentlemen, may be able to propose some one more adapted for this responsible post. I shall be happy to hear of a more eligible nominee, but at present I can not see clearly where you will discover this. Perhaps our respected chairman will inform us what he thinks about it?"

"Whenever I have observed Mr. Miles," answered the senior partner, cautiously, "he has appeared diligent in fulfilling his duties. I am not prepared to signify any gentleman whom I would appoint in preference."

"Very true," from the man in a hurry to be off, whose legs were getting into a very restive condition under the board-room table.

"Let Mr. Miles be called," said the senior partner, and the gong was again sounded, to the surprise of the worthy housekeeper, wondering what on earth was the matter with the bank. Mr. Miles was talking with George Percival. One by one the late manager had been round, shaking hands and saying "good-by" to each. He volunteered no explanation; indeed, was too affected, for he had been connected with the bank for years, and the sorrow, the heart-felt sorrow, manifested by one and all moved him extremely. The effect of George's communication that he was going to leave, and for good, created a sort of panic, so great was the surprise, so ominous the significance; for each knew there would be never another manager like Mr. Percival, with whom each had felt safe so long as he did his duty—a feeling not always attendant upon duty when there is an uncertain helmsman. And last George came up to the head clerk, writing assiduously, with the methodical, regular precision which never varied—a pattern correspondent and accountant, sedulous and unremitting, but with the most astonishing roll to the eyes ever witnessed; this roll was at its most electric when his late superior arrived at the chief desk.

"Come to say good-by, Miles; going to change my quarters."

"Whatever *do* you mean, Mr. Percival?" insinuating his pen through the indistinct-hued hair, and lodging it somewhere on the ear. "Not going to leave, Sir, I hope?" He had turned partly round and was leaning an elbow on the desk.

"Yes, going to leave."

"No misunderstanding, I trust, Sir?"

"Yes, a very serious misunderstanding, by which my veracity, my honor, my honesty, my character, and my reputation are all jeopardized!" George spoke warmly; he felt warmly; he had made a sort of friend of this man, in a business sense, and in the courteous manner usual with heads of departments; thus he could speak more unreservedly.

"Goodness! But you alarm me!" said the other, in a low voice. "Do explain; perhaps I can do something for you, recommend some plan."

George shook his head sadly.

"I fear not! It is about the most mysterious occurrence that has ever come under my notice, and I am sorry enough to be the victim of it; but if the firm hasn't more faith than I have seen today we are certainly best apart, for I can not work under a cloud. I must have all clear as the day, and candid as truth, or I am uncomfortable—so it is as well."

George proceeded to explain particulars in a few hurried words, and sympathy or emotion caused Mr. Miles's supernatural organs of vision to revolve to a phenomenal degree. Removing the lizard-green pocket-handkerchief from an inner cavity, he passed this with mournful meaning over brow and eyes; he evidently felt very much the painful position in which Mr. Percival was placed, and with tremulous solicitude he murmured, "I am thinking of your poor dear mother!"

George saddened on the instant. All had been so unlooked-for, so cruelly abrupt, he had not thought of relations as yet; but it now flashed upon him that before them, as before all the rest of the world, he was *disgraced.*

"Don't you think," put in Stephen, softly, "there is legal remedy? That you might place this in other hands? Some shrewd, sagacious, penetrating lawyer might set this straight."

"Don't care for lawyers."

"Neither do I; but it's wonderful the amount of good they do, although nobody cares for 'em. I know just the man you want; he'd ferret out a mystery and clear a client, or forfeit his professional honor there and then. Never been known to fail—he's a clever one is Coke O'Connor!"

"I shall only be plunging myself into embarrassment I can not meet. Where is the money to come from for lawyer's fees? I shall just contrive to live, and that is all."

"Well, of course it isn't my place to interfere or to advise, but I do so feel for you! We have been such good friends, I can not resist it even at the risk of seeming officious. If I stood in your place, I should draw out that four hundred—I don't really think they deserve the use of it after treating you like this—and I would place it at O'Connor's disposal, in moderation, to draw upon toward clearing you; and, take my word for it, but he'd do it."

There was quite a green, ghastly sort of glitter in the eyes, under influence of his interest and profound sympathy.

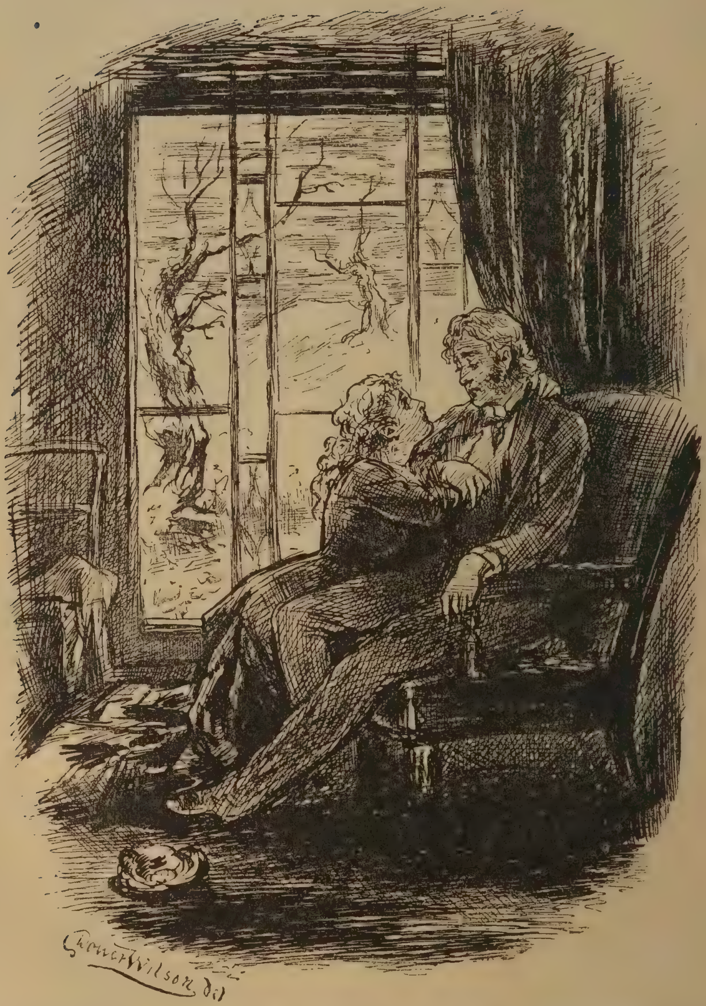
"No," said Mr. Percival, firmly; "it is not worth taking any trouble about. I am quite satisfied upon coming through scathless. I have never yet had occasion to lean upon literature, but I see no just cause or impediment why I should not."

At this juncture Mr. Miles was summoned to the board-room, and shaking hands, he hurried off. George Percival turned to Andrew Wilson with his last word in the London and Olympian:

"I shall not continue in Queen Street now. I must look out for some more modest home, and you will come and see me, when we will consider ways and means. Don't be down-hearted; there is One above who witnesses all!"

Thus he tried to comfort that other, whose heart he knew was heavier even than his own, and the old man's nerveless hand dropped the pen with which he had made feint to write, and his lip quivered with emotion. At his time of life this blow fell doubly severe, and to him, more than it might have done to many, it represented a grievous loss.

END OF VOL. I.


Grover Wilson, del

"KNEELING BEFORE HIM, HER EYES FILLED WITH TEARS, AND WORDS CADENCED WITH SORROW, SHE IMPLORED HIS FORGIVENESS."—[*See Page* 84.]

The Cheveley Novels.

W. B. Tindall
18 Octr 1878

A MODERN MINISTER.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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1878.

A MODERN MINISTER.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

LABAN WIX, PAWNBROKER.

THE effect came afterward, when Andrew Wilson went home to the humble lodging and its patient little inmate. He had always gone home to dinner at twelve, a special concession through the kindness of the manager. Upon this occasion he went home, but never lifted his eyes; his face was not sunned by pleasant thoughts at returning to her. He sank upon a chair, merely drawing her to him, looking up in the pretty face with a mild mournfulness, inexpressibly pathetic, and taking her hand, which he held fondly.

"Are you ill, dear?" she asked. Amy could be intensely sympathetic; the child was naturally sensitive. It came of the impetuous, passionate, half-wild nature which made her heart glow with emotions quite strange to the drawing-room young lady of unexceptionable birth. She was a wayward, intractable little creature, perhaps, but she had some charming ways with her, and one of these was that measure of sensitiveness which made her companionship a bond of sympathy. The scale is very often turned, and no end of willfulness pardoned by this softer forethought and tenderness, exquisite alike in the cottage and the mansion. Very often the inequalities are lost sight of in the pleasant ways which charm unconsciously, and the untutored solace of one of these little ones will sometimes do more than the experienced and coldly philosophic wisdom of the elders. Her devoted attention moved him sadly—it was so hard having to tell her the ill-omened news—yet he would feel the better for her sympathy. To her query, solicitous and tremulous, he answered simply and truthfully, with quivering lips,

"I've been turned off, and our little income is lost. I did hope I should never have to return to the theatre."

"No, you must not do that," answered the girl, thoughtfully, and with a slight shudder.

"What, then, can I do? I know too well the difficulty of getting any respectable employment, at my time of life, and in a shabby coat." He spoke with a bitterness that amounted almost to irony.

"You have a good friend in the gentleman who has already been so kind."

"He is as badly off as I am now. Some envious villain has been working the ruin of the best of men. O Lord!" cried the old man, in a despairing voice, "why are the wicked permitted thus to wrong the innocent?"

"You mustn't give way like this," and she fell upon her knees beside him, her arms resting upon his knees, wooing him to smiles. "Bear up, for my sake; think what will become of me if you give up." This she said to entice him from the dull lethargy of pain in which he appeared to be plunged.

"It seems so hard!" he murmured. "Just getting a few little things together, making a happy home, providing for you, my child, saving you from untold hardship, and now to be deprived of it all—for our tiny savings will melt like snow now that I am out of an engagement—and, as you say, should any thing befall me, whom will you look to, where will you go for that safe home you have had with me?"

Then she stood up, all brave with her few years' wisdom, and hopeful; but she had not meant to lead to this by that remark of hers.

"Don't you begin sorrowing because of me, nor thinking any thing is about to befall you. Remember all you have done for me, how you lifted me out of homeless and uncared-for uncertainty, and provided me with every thing. You have given me love which I had never known before, and have made a changed girl of me; and I have never ceased to think of Dr. Nichols's kind words, that with *me* rested your happiness. I *will* try to make you happy, by being good and useful, and by loving you truly; only smile a little, and let me see you get the better of the trouble. I dare say, now," added the child, with characteristic simplicity, "better folk than we have suffered somehow like this many and many a time." She walked lightly to a corner, and brought to him an old friend, mute but ready with its tuneful fellowship. It had borne the burden of many a sorrow before this, and as he mechanically passed the bow athwart the strings, and drew forth a sad and sensitive quivering, it seemed an expression of the overwrought heart itself.

Days went by, and Andrew Wilson became weaker; he tried right and left for employment, went hither and thither in reply to advertisements, sought far and near for work at the desk, and was told younger men were required; was indifferently bidden to call again, and called again to be coldly told there was no vacancy. He persevered, but with a sinking heart, a fainter courage; Amy cheering him, accompanying him to the very doors, with words of hope to within the portals. No one knew how the child suffered as he came from each with disconsolate visage and dragging footstep, and how difficult it was for her to cheer him on to the next. It was November in London, of itself sufficiently depressing to kill a man of his calibre. Andrew Wilson suffered terribly, not so much from the chill gray fogs and unpleasant weather, or from abstinence (for he had no heart to take his proper sustenance), as from utter weariness akin to utter hopelessness; he wasted to a shadow, and each day's quest became a more dispiriting and discouraging failure. Only the old legend of the weaker going to the wall, as they do daily; younger manhood seemed to have lost its chivalry, and feeling to be banished from the universe.

One day, returning from some of these unsuccessful applications, Andrew Wilson, moody and sorrowing, looking on the ground instead of straight ahead, as these poor souls should, ran upon another in similar plight, but whom misfortune had not deprived of his politeness, for he lifted his shining hat with marvellous affability, and remarked, graciously,

"Now I do hope your lordship is not hurt! Very careless of me! Don't apologize, I beg; it was quite my fault, quite! Absorbed in thought—didn't observe any one advancing; but I crave your lordship's pardon!"

The other laid a hand gently on his arm, speaking sadly, while setting him right.

"You are in error—I am not a nobleman."

"But I am—Sir Dickson Cheffinger, of CHEFFINGER!" And the poor gentleman watched narrowly the result of this announcement. It did not create any marked effect. The newly entitled was neither astounded nor confounded, but he looked inexpressibly worn and tired. Sir Dickson noticed this, and he said:

"You don't look well—seem poorly—come and have something. Nay, but you shall!" and linking his arm through that of the other, he dragged at the clerk until he had his way; and any where but in London, where poor gentlemen are many, the spectacle of these two unfortunates, neither illumined by very clear lights, one as wearied and sick of it all as the other, one with his child and his music to live for, both brittle straws by vulgar measure; the other with his noble compatriots and estates in air, both bubble-hued by common thought—the spectacle, we say, would elsewhere have attracted notice, excited ridicule, set good folk staring, and the dogs a-barking; but in London—well, in London they were one with the many.

"We will enter this hotel—not like my club, but it will do!"

It was not a hotel, it was a tavern, and those grouped at the bar stared hard and grinned: cordwainers, dry-salters, draymen, and two or three from the cab-rank near. They enjoyed Sir Dickson's call for Champagne immensely, and gathered round. "Seedy, for swells, mate!" said one. "Jackdaws!" was the contemptuous reply, although the ornithological application scarcely appears.

"Be off without paying, you'll see. We're in for a shine." The man at the bar opened a mock Champagne bottle and poured out some vile effervescing fluid with,

"Money, gents, please? Three-and-six!" And the cordwainers *et cie.* laughed outright. Sir Dickson plunged his hand into his pocket, as accustomed to so doing, unconscious of the gray gulf between this and that; but soon withdrew his hand, a look of blank dismay overspreading his delicate, care-worn face.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, "I've only three half-pence! But, never mind, leave my card," fumbling in every pocket. "Left the case on dressing-table! Awfully careless! What's to be done?" pitifully to the other needy gentleman, who, powerless to advise, could only look timorously over his shoulder at the brawny group with the pewter pots, closing them in and prepared for a scene. If they expected an outbreak they were disappointed, for the two were passive as the most guilty of culprits. Meanwhile the barman had whistled to another employed upon the embellishment of a row of cans, and this one had slipped out, returning instantly with a police officer, who, catching the look by which the barman indicated the unfortunates, stood before them, stern, and as meaning no nonsense.

"What's the charge?" In a husky voice, yet sounding ferocious to the culprits, whom he could have put one under each arm and have thus marched off, there and then, to the station.

"Calling for three-an'-sixpenny Champagne, an' niver a blissid nothink in both their pockits to pay the reckoning!"

The officer looked really grim at that, and he said,

"Well, you'll eft to come along o' me, yer know; and best come quietly!" giving certain mechanical appliances in his pocket an ugly sort of click.

"My patience, what an indignity!" exclaimed Sir Dickson Cheffinger. "What ever will my people think!" Even in this emergency regardful of his style and family.

"Better not let them know my name," he whispered to his companion in trouble; "sure to get into the papers; such a disgrace—for a Cheffinger, too! But never mind, Baron Rothschild will bail me out—'Any time, Cheffinger,' said the Baron the other night at dinner, when we contrived to have a quiet word together—'any time I can be of service, command me.'"

Andrew Wilson could not quite understand his new acquaintance, who had thus inopportunely introduced him to the law.

"Now, gents, is this little matter to be settled, or will yer reserve yer defense?"

"I am sorry, officer, this unforeseen occurrence should have rendered it imperative to—"

"Now, come, none o' that palavering. Pay down, or off yer goes."

"No," said Sir Dickson, with dignity, "I will not. I was about to explain the matter, when you, with a rudeness I never experienced from a police officer before, interrupted me, and—and—well, quite checked the explanation, for, by the spotless ermine, I don't remember a word of it now." Said with most ludicrous innocence.

"Daft!" went the round, and poor Wilson shuddered, for he thought, what if he had been taken in tow by a madman! "The very streets seem to rise up against me," he said to himself, despairingly, "and in all this city, not one hand is raised to help me." Now, mark.

The doors were thrown open for the better egress of the suspicious-looking confederates, the spectators divided; and saying, "Now you'll go quietly, won't yer?" the officer caught an arm of each with a grip which might have been studied in the Tower; when, looking nervously at the thronged pathway, Sir Dickson suddenly gave a joyful cry. A passer-by, ever alive to the appeal of the calamitous, turned instantly, and in two strides was upon the scene, amidst the contentious group, which fell back with sullen deference.

"What is the matter, officer? You are hurting them; violence is unjustifiable. Now, Mr. Cheffinger, be brief, and tell me what all this is about." To the poor gentleman, whose face was now sunny, and relieved of its temporary embarrassment.

Mr. Cheffinger explained, and the gentleman handed his card to the officer.

"I suppose if I settle this claim, my friend will be at liberty? Anyway, I will be responsible for his re-appearance, if necessary."

The officer consulted with the publican, and the affair was arranged amicably, and to the full satisfaction of both.

"And when will Mr. Cheffinger be more circumspect?" asked the Rev. Westley Garland, with the old kind smile, as they walked slowly along. "Suppose I had not been in town, and had not been passing, how ill you might have fared. And your friend here, who is this?"

Mr. Garland looked more sorry than amused when the other replied,

"On the honor of a Cheffinger, I am unable to say."

The clerk explained, and his voice was so gentle, while all woe-begone, that the Minister was interested immediately.

"You have not been well," he said, decisively, as warding off contradiction by virtue of personal observation; "and—pardon me—you appear to be in trouble?"

Andrew Wilson was overcome by the Minister's solicitous inquiry, and that nameless sympathy which is expressed by manner, rather than words.

"Yes," he replied, slowly and painfully, "I have been very unfortunate."

"Perhaps I may be enabled to help you."

Without reservation the clerk narrated the incidents with which the reader is familiar, and, as was perfectly natural, was warm in his praise of George Percival. The Minister evidenced singular interest.

"You would like to know Mr. Percival," said the clerk, simply; "his manners are as courteous and gracious as your own. He has been a good friend to me (God bless him!) ever since I told him about my little girl; and he said to me, 'I can feel for you, Andrew; I may have to provide for one myself some day.' And now," said the old man, with bitterness, "he is as ill off as I am, in the sense of occupation; although, to be sure, he has his books to depend on, while I have *nothing*, and with all the years and health on the wrong side. Well I recall now how he said to me that morning when it happened, 'Now, Andrew, old friend, I have to put my experimental philosophy into practice—to live by my books, and by them to keep *my* little one.' I don't know what he meant, and I didn't pay much heed to it then, being so overwhelmed myself; but I remember it now. He is not in London, I was told the day before yesterday, when I ventured to call where he lives, to see if he could do something for me. 'Gone down home,' the servant said, 'into Hertfordshire;' and I came away the worse for that piece of news. All things seem the same! the same!"

The Minister betrayed no emotion beyond a slightly rising color, but there was significance deeper than the mere coincidence revealed in this curious encounter. He turned to Sir Dickson:

"Why have you not let me hear from you? I have taken no news in this instance to mean bad news."

"Very bad!" responded Sir Dickson, plaintively; "and yet," thoughtfully, "the Princess!" He laid a hand gently on his friend's arm. "The Princess. No sooner found than lost, and I can not forget that beauteous vision."

The Minister thought it one of his olden vagaries. He nodded with his usual graceful attention, and then said, "Now I want to hear if any progress has been made."

"You will excuse me," timidly interrupted the clerk, "I must be getting home; I have already been away too long."

He saw that the Minister and the strange gentleman were engaged with some private matter. He thought, too, of Amy; and, for another thing, he did not wish the Minister to see his lodging: it was so humble now.

Mr. Garland shook hands very kindly with this new waif added to his long list of pensioners, and when Andrew went on his way it was with a lighter heart, and to lay before his little *protégée* a crisp five-pound note.

It served to provide a variety of necessaries, but the child saw that her guardian was sinking in spite of it all; and when alone she grew very sad, taxing her shrewd head how best to relieve the depression under which she thought he was wasting away. Amy did not know, as we know, that there comes a time of life when a blow is thrice a blow; a time when there is less power to support it; when a sudden shock, followed by continual disappointment, wears away the body, benumbs the spirits, deadens the very soul itself.

And one morning, when a thick yellow fog overhung the city, and changed to ghastly hues every object within and without the houses, Andrew could not rise at the accustomed hour. Amy made some toast, and prepared the tempting breakfast a child so daintily understands the contriving of; but he could not take it, for a choking sensation was at the throat, and a chill that deadened even his terrible anxiety on her account. She could not bear the glassy look that came into the fond old eyes, and she brought his violin, and placed it by his side. Half mechanically the thin fingers felt for the strings, but their coldness thrilled him, and he feebly raised a hand searching for the warmer touch he needed at that moment. She knelt beside him, his hand straying to the grateful warmth below her curling hair. More faintly the touch dallied with the tresses, then the hand weighed heavy upon her shoulder, and one of the myriad broken upon the wheel had passed away.

It was a sorry time for the child. At first she was too overcome, mourning for her poor dead friend, to do any thing; then she kissed the cold face with great reverence. She went very slowly and sadly down stairs, and told the woman of the house. She, with feeling, enjoined her to remain in the chamber she herself used, saying they would see to every thing. And she did so, faithfully handing over to the child such few shillings as remained after the outlay attending that humble consignment to the last resting-place. Amy met with sympathizers in plenty, but after her small stock of money had dwindled away, times went badly with her, and it seemed as though the period of uncertain knocking about, which preceded the theatrical era, had returned. One after another the poor neighbors sought to befriend her to the best of their slender means, but the fare was sorry and the hardship great. Then she fell upon strange quarters, and knew one of the most singular of experiences.

* * * * * *

A shop stood at a corner where three ways met, and the continuous stream of pedestrians seemed forever rounding a point—a dingy old shop as any in discolored London, bearing this sign upon the half-circular board facing the three ways,

LABAN WIX, PAWNBROKER.

The windows were stuffed with the oldest of unredeemed pledges, and these the proprietor, who never aspired to the accomplishment of window-dressing, had not disturbed for a very long period. There, cemented by dust, old treasures sometimes of happy hearts knew a union of repose strangely at variance with the bustle and unrest of the busy streets. In good truth the old shawls and antique cruets, the roll of dress silk and young woman's jacket, the warming-pan, snuff-box, and writing-desk, were too far gone to attract the cursory attention of one, even, of the myriads turning the corner daily.

Inside the dreary mart of exchange all was of corresponding dinginess and dustiness; and old Mr. Wix, who conducted the business himself, was sometimes invisible in the cloud of dust arising when bundles were redeemed after being left longer than usual, and the bonder brought them down on the counter with a bang that caused his timid clients to start dismayed.

Altogether it was not a nice place; the most devoted of his visitors were glad to escape from his company and premises.

Nevertheless, "Old Wix's" was an institution and an accommodation. It was not unusual for people of the back streets to toss up to see who should drop in at Laban's, and out would come an old mended petticoat from one, a pillow-case from another, an apron from a third, a flat-iron from a fourth, and so on, until a bundle was made up: the proceeds to be divided, and a glass of gin awarded to the delicate ambassador.

Odd patrons had Laban Wix, and he would leer ominously over the bit of card whereon his fumbling fingers traced name and amount. He was curt and sharp and bearish, and sometimes swore.

The old man did not enjoy the most enviable of reputations among those who every week derived benefit from his liberality; and he was called hard names for his thrift. The more pious of his customers averred that one night the devil pledged his tongs, and wanted afterward to take them out without paying the interest; and because Master Wix would have none of such dealing it was said he was very much tormented, which might or might not account for his sourness of temper. Another select story current was to the effect of the old man being very much of a miser. It was commonly believed that great treasures were concealed about the premises; but since nobody ever ventured beyond the shop counter, it was clear this necessarily amounted to mere speculation. In short, all that the idle and vulgar could invent, the malicious circulate, and the credulous believe, was discussed; and the old pawnbroker had a sorry time of it.

Mr. Wix used to keep his shop open long after any of his neighbors: he held a theory that several intelligent dwellers thereabouts used to go drinking, and in various ways dissipating the whole of their hard-earned coin, and afterward come to his obliging temple of commerce for the transfer of that which represented supper and breakfast. Thus he was open very late, generally until twelve o'clock, when he would march round with the shutters, keeping a sharp lookout all the time he was fixing and barring and screwing; then, from some innermost recess, he would come staggering under weight of a door, which was lowered on to its hinges and closed, locked, bolted, barred, and padlocked. Then supper, a scant ceremony over the driest piece of cheese conceivable. Following this, another minute examination of the premises from top to bottom, lest any one had, by stealth, crept in while he had been writing upon one of his tickets, as if a wizened scarecrow like this old half-starved eccentric would have had the power of defending himself, supposing such to have been the case. Then into his small back yard, where he had spent more than he had ever spent upon any thing, in the purchase of a mortary sort of cement, wherein he had fixed all his unredeemed old bottles with the bottoms knocked out. Mr. Wix used to get it all over by a quarter past twelve. After closing, when all by himself, with only the hideous stock in trade about him, each article of which was symbolical of some terrible care and grief, some shattered home or broken heart—then, when alone with his griping, greedy harvest, he knew pangs of a weird sort, remorseful, ghostly feelings, and grim terror-stricken suffering, which all the counting of his gold or jingling of his trinkets or flashing of his diamonds could not appease—suffering that made him a coward indeed, all knocking at the knees and panting while he tremblingly looked over his shoulder, for there always seemed somebody about; and he fancied grisly, horrible shapes stealing from the bundles, rustling the garments, and causing something or other to tumble over. On windy nights it was worse even than this, and the queer commotion among the store was such as to indicate to his troubled mind the still more troubled spirits haunting the shelves, pulling at the chattels, shrieking and screaming in the top chambers, where reserves were piled upward to the ceiling, moaning and double moaning in cupboards where the plate was kept; and Laban would crouch with very fear, so close the talons seemed upon him. Yet it was not convenient to keep an assistant, unless that assistant could make it convenient to keep himself; but as the pleasures and advantages incidental to residence with Mr. Wix were not overrated, the contingency was highly improbable. Once or twice he had thought over the importance of taking an apprentice; but, to tell the truth, he had a deep-seated dread of London boys, whom he playfully styled the imps incarnate. That plan therefore remained in abeyance, and the haunted pawnbroker remained haunted unbrokenly.

One blustering evening, with business slack and houses closing quicker for the inclement night, it was very dull in at the pawnbroker's. Nobody seemed anxious to pledge. The dim, rainbesprinkled globes were hung upon the outer wall for nothing; the public would not pawn; and the firm sat crooning in the little den at the back of the shop, wondering if there was nothing left to pawn, or if a newer and a better shop had opened in the vicinity; and very indignantly did the old man take an unredeemed poker and turn over the contents of the window. There had not been such a turn-over for twelve or more years; and an old opera-glass, that had not seen the gas for all that time, came up and stared all bleared and sleepily at the changed custodian, whom the other pledges, now moved to the bottom, had seen grow gray and withered, and completely saturnine.

Laban read but little. He had among the pawned lots a pile of old books, and one of these was *Lives of the Misers*, and this work became his book of faith; but Laban read very little.

His general occupation in slack times was weighing the plate, to see if there was any decrease in weight through keeping; brighten or burnish he never did, lest it should lighten the gold or silver. He was weighing the plate this night we tell of, mumbling to his scales, and half swearing because some of the pieces came out a degree lighter than he expected.

A tall and not ungraceful woman entered the shop, and with her a little girl; both were thinly clad; they looked worn and a-hungered, and the woman's face betrayed a sharp and agonized struggle.

The old man stared at them curiously and descended from his stool with alacrity—it might be a watch or a bracelet; he was in the mood for driving a hard bargain that night. Mr. Wix was naturally brusque and constitutionally rude, and he mumbled imperiously, as would a man in a large way of business whose time was not to be trifled with,

"What yer got, an' what d'ye want on it?"

"Have — you — a — more private place than this?" tremblingly asked the poor woman, while she leaned with great weariness upon Laban Wix's counter.

The pawnbroker indicated an inner stall, partitioned off for the convenience of the more sensitive of his clients.

"Now, mum—your pleasure."

"What will you allow me on this?" She had one hand on the curl-clustered head of the child, while the other rested heavily upon the counter, where Laban looked eagerly down. It might be a diamond. The old man's eyes glistened; he was in a rare mood for diamonds. But there was nothing under his customer's hand; he looked in her face, and he came to the decision that she was mad; it was evident she could see something that he could not see. He drew back—shrank, as it were; for he objected to mad people strongly, and more particularly to a mad woman. Or could the diamond have fallen? He turned icy as he swooped to the floor.

"Allow you on what?" he gasped, still upon his hands and knees with an oil-lamp; "there's nothing here."

"Upon this child." The hand was still upon the little curly head. The man stared at the woman; the woman stared at the man; and the child, half frightened, looked first at one and then at the other. She had a pretty, flushed, rain-sprinkled face. The old man had not seen such a face for the last half of his term of days, and, taken aback, he could only murmur,

"I don't think I understand, quite."

"I have pledged or sold every thing to keep us from starving; I have only this left, but—she—is old enough to be very handy. We want food, shelter, clothing. If you will provide these for the child, I will leave her for a time in your hands, and her ready service will amply repay you; but you will advance me a trifle, however small, to enable me to procure some sort of a shelter for myself."

This was all so unusual and so contrary to the business ethics of Master Wix, that he stood irresolute, a semi-comical expression upon his countenance. Then he pretended reluctance, but thinking of his house all the while. He might make the pledge very useful, and his dreary place would be robbed of its loneliness; but he was not going to offer much. That would be contrary to his principles.

"What do you want on it?" he asked, grumblingly.

"One sovereign," was the decisive answer.

"Five shillings," replied Wix, profoundly indifferent.

"Can you lend me no more?" asked the woman, impatiently, with her arms about the little one.

"Well, you know, it's not lawful, strictly speaking; although I don't know that there's a law agen it, but it's the feed, you know. Can't lend more than five. Take it or leave it. You'll have less than no interest to pay on that; only —remember, at the end of the year, if not had out, *it's mine!*"

The woman nodded, and while he wrote upon the ticket and its duplicate, she knelt before the child; her throbbing brow rested upon its bosom, and clasping a small white hand, she passionately implored forgiveness for the deed, explaining with broken, tremulous sorrow that although not her own, yet was she dearly loved.

Then a hasty embrace, and an entreaty that the man would use her kindly; and snatching up the money with one last hurried kiss, she fled from the place, disappeared under those misty, mocking golden balls, and faded away in the drizzling, darksome night.

And Laban Wix stood and stared at the child in pawn.

It was a new sensation altogether, having a thing of this sort; he did not even know which ought to speak first. Laban spoke:

"Of course you don't eat suppers?"

The child was frightened, and she answered, "No."

"But to-night you're hungry, not having had much lately. You won't ever be as hungry again as you are to-night."

The child shook her head, her eyes filled with tears. She was thinking of the dead.

"Well, there's some taters left from dinner; put 'em on, and make some broth."

He pointed to an unredeemed saucepan, and told her the situation of the cistern. The child did as she was bidden, then the old man not unkindly took her by the hand.

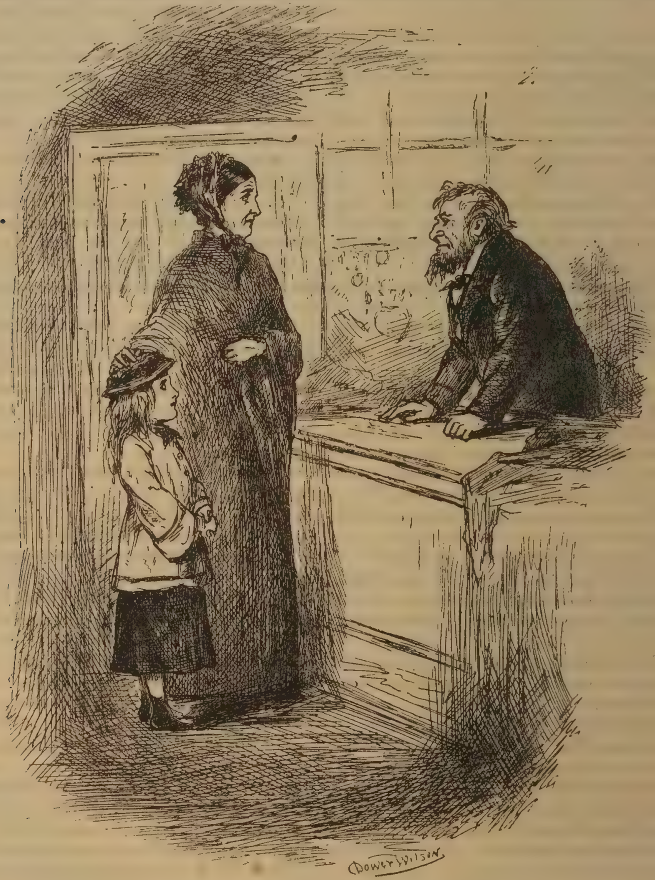
"Just you come along o' me, and I'll show you where things is kept."

He led the way to the back offices. He felt very strange, and as yet scarcely accustomed to it; but she was so innocently pretty, and withal so quick and ready, he rather rubbed his hands over the transaction. A rat ran along a shelf, crouched on his hind-legs, brushed his whiskers, and peeping impudently at the new-comer, jogged on homeward to the wainscot.

"I'll wring your neck," muttered Mr. Wix, with evil design anent that quadruped.

The little girl shuddered at the sight of the creature, whereupon the old man re-assured her thus:

"Don't you be afeard o' them; they're my pets, and wery useful they are when one can't send to the butcher's. Of course one 'd prefer hare, but beggars mustn't be choosers. Wust on 'em is, they nibble at the pledges."



"WHAT WILL YOU ALLOW ME ON THIS?"

The child turned faint at the bare mention, and thought even the cold wet street was better than this.

A poor woman entered the shop—she carried a parcel—and in tearful accents begged something might be advanced her upon a little frock. Peeping behind the partition, the child in pawn heard and saw, and her tears fell like rain.

"It ain't worth nothing; got a trinket you can throw in with it?"

With some difficulty and with trembling the woman removed her wedding ring.

"Light as a feather," grumbled Laban, then tossed both to his new assistant.

"Two bob; take it or leave it."

The head drooped assentingly, and she leaned painfully against the partition. Then, while the pawnbroker wrote, he bade the child tie a piece of string round the bundle, and pointed out the place where the ring should be put among others of the kind; he then instructed her how to place the parcel in one of the uppermost pigeon-holes, to which she ascended by a ladder; when she came down he pushed the ticket toward her, and directed it should be given to the customer. The child held her hand out to the woman's, and while she dropped the card into the poor thin hand extended, returned also the ring. A meaning glance stayed the exclamation upon the woman's lips, and she gratefully took them both. When this customer was well out of the shop, Laban chuckled pleasantly, and ordered,

"Put the shutters up—but first sweep the shop out:" pointing to an old broom, the hair of which was worn to a frill. This sweeping was always an operation of importance, for Laban had come upon rare treasures in his sweeping days: pins and buttons, tape, string, and other relics of his customers. He had, indeed, once found a threepenny bit, carried about with him ever after in a corner of his waistcoat pocket enwrapped in tissue-paper, as a sort of decoy in case there might be another about. The little girl having swept out to the best of her ability, the master went over it all again, giving her a lesson, as he called it, and effectually cleaned up the whole, bending over the be-handled dust-pan by the light of a farthing candle, to sort out the finds. Diverse as these were, there was always a certain similarity, and he had an old box for each: pins, hair-pins, tape, ribbon, buttons, needles, paper, string, calico shreds, flannel list, and bits of leather off worn boots so often crossing his threshold. The sweeping was hardly accomplished when a rough-looking customer entered. He handed the pawnbroker a silk pocket-handkerchief. It was a good one, and probably stolen.

"Can't lend much on this," muttered old Wix; "it's going—look a-here, see them lines? that 'll be a slit; it's rotten as can be," holding it up to the light.

Without a word the man whisked it into his pocket and strode out of the shop; and Laban was troubled. He meant to have had that pocket-handkerchief.

"Billy Johnson's found another shop," he muttered, discontentedly; and then turning to the child, "Here, you, follow that chap, and find out where he takes the pocket-hanky."

The bright eyes glittered, and she was on pursuit like a greyhound, below somebody's umbrella grown strangely ventilated since left in pawn.

She followed him along street after street, wide and narrow, but her chase terminated at a beer shop. Then she commenced retracing her way, but became confused, for he had led her far from Wix's establishment. Bewildered, she stood by a lamp post reflecting: she could not recall any definite landmark to guide her.

A gentleman came past, tall, with handsome, kindly face; and he paused on the instant, stooping to the flushed rain-sprinkled face, much taken by its beauty, or its plight on that cheerless night, all exposed, and without even a hat to bind back its tangle of glistening tresses.

"You seem in trouble, little girl; can I help you?"

"I have lost my way, Sir," she cried, flushed and panting.

"Yes, and will be laid up after this, or I am mistaken. Perhaps I can direct you. Where is your home?"

"I have no home—I am in pawn."

"What do you mean? Stand under my umbrella and tell me."

She explained sufficient to account for her singular remark, and the gentleman looked down upon the little fugitive, much interested.

"Wix, Pawnbroker," he repeated. "Yes, I know the name and shop; I once held a Mission in the neighborhood, and learned much of the poverty and suffering thereabouts."

"You are a clergyman," said the child, with a considerable admixture of awe.

"Yes, and something more—a friend, even as my Divine Master was a friend to all the poor and sorrowing, all the sick and suffering, and, above all, to little children without home or friends; so come and let me see if something can be done with Mr. Wix."

"I am afraid he will be rude to you," she ventured, timidly, while trotting along beside him.

"But I do not mind that; and even rudeness may be sifted until finer meaning is found. I have seen the old man in his shop. I am not sure, but I fancy I have been in it. Nay, now I think, I *am* sure of it. I called upon a poor woman who was insufficiently clad, and I went to Wix's for her parcel."

"You did that!" said the child, breathlessly.

"And is it so very wonderful, little one?" he asked, with his sad smile. The child was silent. It was sweet company to her, and she would have prolonged that walk, under the outspreading umbrella, comfortable and warm as some tent, for he held it well over her.

In due time they entered the shop, the proprietor of which looked up with angry suspicion.

"Good-evening, Mr. Wix."

"It ain't a good evening. It's one o' the baddest and wustest that ever was. You're the parson, an' you ain't wanted here."

The gentleman shook the rain-drops from his umbrella with undisturbed serenity, and still with that kind and patient smile which had so won upon the desolate child.

"I expect the clergyman, like the doctor, is not always the most welcome of visitors, Mr. Wix; but by your leave I will stand up a few minutes while the shower continues."

The old man surlily proceeded with the occupation upon which he was engaged. The Minister remarked, carelessly,

"Been talking with our little friend here. She had lost her way, and I've had the pleasure of leading her home. But isn't this a somewhat irregular transaction, Mr. Wix?"

"It ain't any bizness of your'n, that I can see, to come along preaching at me for, whether it's reg'lar or irreg'lar."

"Well, the fact is I have made it my particular business to study the ills and wrongs befalling human life."

"Then it's a pity you didn't come an' see me afore. I've a lot on 'em. But we'll settle this pretty quick. Are you in bizness here, or am I? Are you in pardnership with me? 'Cause if not, it's no way acceptable for you to interfere."

"I intended no discourtesy, my good friend."

"I ain't a good friend. A poor beggar's nearer the description. Bin here forty year come Janivary, and lost money every year."

"What I meant to say was, that the transaction is scarcely lawful."

"You'd be puzzled to show me a law agen it!"

"Because it is what no just law-maker would ever dream of guarding against."

Mr. Wix deigned no reply. He resumed the pinning and unpinning of his bundles. The old pawnbroker was moth-haunted, and every evening held an examination of any bundles he happened to be suspicious about.

"I have a proposal to make," said the Minister, with decision. "It is that you allow *me* to provide this forlorn child with some comfortable home. I have no doubt but that one among my people will receive her and afford the protection of a mother; and any expense attending it, I shall be happy to set straight. You will admit this to be better than her remaining here; and in the event of any of her friends calling upon you, you will only have to refer them to me. There is my card."

"And there's mine—WIX, PAWNBROKER—and if you've nothing to leave, good-ev'ning:" tossing a pawn ticket to the Minister, who, in no way offended by the brusqueness, returned it with civil thanks. He was a great student of life, patient and strong under affront, but uniformly mild before misfortune. How did he know what long train of troubles and disappointments might not have led up to this crinkled and crabbed old age?

"Put your shutters up, Mr. Wix, and let me provide a little supper."

"Perwiding a thing, and taking a thing away, is a different matter. You can perwide as often and as much as you like."

The Minister went out, and was gone some little time. When he returned, the place was closed for the night. He had brought in with him a variety of delicacies.

"You've bin a long while. I ain't partic'lar about shops when I'm hungry."

Mr. Garland handed his wet coat to the broker, who inwardly appraised it admiringly, then whispered, confidentially, "I buy old coats, you know, as well as lend on 'em," and proceeded to hang it upon a nail.

"I think our little maid had better slip off that frock and those old boots; you will have a heavy medical fee to pay if you are not careful."

A look of blank dismay overspread the hard face, and he quickly emptied one of the bundles and tossed a blue silk frock, a pair of white ribbed stockings, and some boots of the Hessian make, to the child, with a command to retire and change. She obeyed at once, with a glance of reverent gratitude at the thoughtful friend; he with a singular look of pity divided between the child and those sad reminders of some other grievous trouble.

"How full the world seems of sorrow and trouble!"

"I've had nothing else for sixty-six year."

"You must have seen much around you."

"The shelves have. Them bundles could tell queer stories. Sometimes of a night, while I sit here, the most awfulest things comes forth from those shelves, and there's a many creeps from the cupboards up stairs—lean, staring, horrible things. I passes 'em going up to bed, and they clutch me with long sharp claws. Ugh! they're a beastly lot. I throwed that packet o' duplicates at 'em last night, but there's no scaring them, and the noise they make arterwards is awful. That's what I want the little un for—understand? Sort o' company."

The Minister took the old man's hand with great kindness, and with sympathy he said:

"You have been too much alone, too much confined to the house. How long is it since you went for a walk?"

"Twelve year or more—wouldn't go out now if you paid me. Pretty scarecrow I'd look! And come back to find the place robbed—of the bundles, I mean. I've nothing else; I'm frightfully poor."

"A wonderful deal of good would result from a walk. For one thing, you would lose all these terrors you tell me trouble you at night."

"Good? I've been waiting for good too long. Don't want it now."

"You should go out and seek it. It is quite useless expecting it to call upon us."

"But it has to-night," replied the old miser, with more softened accents. The Minister bowed, with a pleased expression. With much grave charity and composure he was accustomed to account for all the strange conduct and opinion he met in the world, which, as long as he tenanted it, he did not expect to find joined with the nicety of an ivory puzzle, or toned and tinted with the harmonious delicacy of a Watteau.

Amy returned, and very pretty she appeared in the change of dress. True, the frock was some sizes too short for her sturdy limbs, but its color in contrast with the rich brown of her hair and deep bloom upon her cheek was becoming and tasteful. The picture lighted up that humble room upon the instant.

"Well, this is a change—quite a fairy, I declare, and ready for a good supper."

Thus the Minister, patting the glossy head, while the child simply looked her thanks.

"Poor little thing!" he thought; "I should like to know her story, and what has brought all this about."

"Better sit down," exclaimed Laban, impatiently. "This ain't a club, and we ain't often honored with wisitors, or we'd get some furniter in; and you ministers ain't used to roughing it this way. Lord, how I hate the clergy!"

And without more ado Mr. Wix set about picking a chicken bone. Disdaining those luxuries of civilization, the knife and fork, he had taken the largest of the bones between finger and thumb, and was ravenously gnawing away at it.

The Minister saw that his little friend was liberally provided for. He contented himself with a hard biscuit, whereat Laban's eyes glistened with greedy satisfaction.

"You're a small eater, you are," he said; "you can come to supper often on these terms."

"It will be your turn next to come to supper with me."

"Don't go out—told you afore."

"But I want to persuade you."

"I ain't to be persuaded. Call that bone picked, girl?" He snatched it away, and fell to picking it himself, then he laid it carefully on one side with the simple remark, "Soup to-morrow."

"Where are you going to put her?" asked the Minister, after supper, indicating the child.

"She'll sleep on some o' the bundles; my hammock's at the top."

The Minister rose to go, bestowing a glance of kind pity, while taking the small hand and saying good-night.

"You'll allow her to come and see me to-morrow? I will walk home with her, and bring something for your supper."

"I don't mind on those conditions; and when you are about it you might make it enough for the next day's dinner."

After their new friend had gone there was a dreadful stillness in the place, and the little girl's heart began to quake. There were such gloomy corners and grim nooks, such flickering and flitting of shadowy, shapeless horrors, she experienced a sense of strong, overpowering terror. She noticed, moreover, that the old man became morose and silent. She cast slant looks on his furrowed face, hard-toned as some old Dutch masterpiece. She searched every wrinkle for one kinder and tenderer than the rest, but all were hard, and darkened over with an expression more chilling than the hardness. She ventured to cough, and he started as though a gun had gone off. She pushed the candle a little aside so that it could no longer shine upon the face, and it guttered and flickered and snapped as though it had caught the infection, and he glared upon that candle viciously. Down from the niches of darkly colored wood, up from the tenantless basement, out from the cupboards and shelves, came the uncanny company that troubled the old pawnbroker.

"I say," he gasped, with bated breath, "it's no good sitting here. I'll get to bed. Do you drag out some o' the bundles, and put 'em on the counter."

"I couldn't sleep there, all the things would see me. I'll creep into some corner. Shall you be *far* off?"

"Top o' the house. 'Tisn't a lively walk to it, either. You shall accompany me—in course that's what I had you for. You'll soon run down agen."

And he strode off, the child trembling, pale with fear, and standing in as great dread of himself as of the ghostly horrors around. She ran after him, never daring to look behind her, and holding one little bit of his coat tail between fingers and palm. There seemed no end to the twistings and twinings of the ancient dwelling, all deserted save for the stores of property and dust-thick reserves untouched for ages. Their footsteps had a strangely muffled sound, and she seemed to hear a creeping in their rear. Chilled and so desolate, she could not restrain her tears. He turned upon her with smothered fierceness.

"If you don't leave off that snivelling, I'll pitch you out o' the window." And he pointed over the strewn floor to where she could see the reflection of a street lamp upon three moist balls dingily golden. She checked the sobbing, and they went higher and higher still, until just beneath the tiles was a cunning recess in which the old man concealed his valuables. It was here he made his bed, slung as upon shipboard, sacking and a moth-eaten blanket, and an unredeemed coverlet.

He gruffly said good-night, and pushed close the garret door, while the trembling child stood outside, unable to move from very fear. She crouched by his door, straining to catch the slightest sound, for even that would be company, would tell of something alive in the house. She buried her face in her hands to keep out the dreadful darkness, while her elbows rested upon her shaking knees. The rain pattering on the tiles made an unearthly fidgeting, the wind came soughing along the landing, the sign hanging without creaked with the gibbet rhythm—that most dismal of all the refrains of midnight. Somebody somewhere had put a flower pot on the ledge of an upper window, and this blew down, and a tile went rattling after it, making "a devil of a din," to quote from Laban, who also heard it. The noise effectually broke the spell of horror that had bound the child, by leading her thoughts to others—some one had placed that flower pot there, that some one was not so very far off; she would seek out the back windows. Houses were close together at this part, as she had noticed when in the yard below. She might see a light somewhere. What company it would be!

Gliding cautiously along the clammy wall, she came to a door; it was locked; her heart went down a little at that, while the swift feet of a rat pressed her foot as it ran over the eminence. Farther on she nearly fell through an opening that yawned in her very path. She came to the stairs, and paused, uncertain about descending—they were sure to creak beneath her footstep; the old man would be alarmed, might mistake her for a robber, perhaps sally forth with some deadly weapon—but it must be attempted; and lightly as a fairy she stepped over the perilous ground. Opening another door at the foot of the stairs, a gust of close, musty air met her in the face; but there was no window any where that she could see, and she tried the adjoining door. Yes, there was a window, and three or four stars upward, and the sorrowful, desolate child sat down in the centre of the litter scattered upon the floor, thinking of her mother, who might even then be cold and white under the great grim river. She looked hard and with terrible yearning at those stars, which, what with her tears and the rain, were sadly diluted before their rays reached to her heart. She felt so wholly woe-begone and miserable, and so given up, it required all the childish faith to go on looking for that window. It was no light matter turning out from that room again, so cheerless and intensely dark was all without. While feeling her way along the passage, she suddenly heard a sound that transfixed her with horror; it was a footfall, as light as her own, and then a panting breathing as something passed close. All that she had suffered was as nothing compared with her feelings at this moment. Half suffocated, quivering with dread, in awful trepidation, she stretched forth her hands. They encountered the handle of a door, which she opened and darted through, straight to the window, which was open. Very near she saw the open window of an adjoining house, where a boy, who seemed to her even as an angel, was placing some pots of flowers upon the ledge, probably mindful of some favorites before the gentle rain was over. He was all in white; a light in the room seemed to shed a halo about the fair young head. The face, seen by starlight, was of infinite beauty. Without pausing to think of the dangerous nature of the act, with one little cry of warning, the girl flew straight to the saving arms, an astonished face bending over the nestled captive. It had all been done so quickly, it could not but be done with safety. In circumstances of instant peril it is the wavering which destroys. Whoever she might be, however she came, the boy lent his tender protection, and held her firm until the fluttering heart was quiet and the panting breath was still. Then he softly closed the window and drew down the blind, by which time the little one was herself again and blushing finely, which of course made her look ten times as pretty. On this score there was not a pin to choose between them, for a more bewitching pair of faces could not well have been found in London. The boy was very young, not, perhaps, more than a year or so older than herself, yet exercising in this sudden and delicate emergency so much of grace and tenderness, a stronger and braver than our girl might well have been befooled into clinging to the angelic theory. He was so quiet with it all, with that sensitive tact so often found in boys, but seldom in girls. So soft with his words and ways, she could not have been more safe or more contented with the tenderest of women. Forming an impromptu toga with an Austrian blanket, the scarlet and blue stripes of which lent another foil to his beauty, he offered the visitor a low easy-chair beside the bed, while he enthroned himself upon the latter, contemplating, with admiring leisure and with perfect respect, the flushed little face before him. Then he said, with a charming smile:

"We are always meeting strangely, Amy. Perhaps you will tell me what is the matter now, and how you came next door."

"I've been left in pawn. Ah! I've known some trouble, Arthur, since I saw you last."

"Not been ill again, I hope?"

"No, not been ill again. I've lost *him!* And since then, Arthur, I've belonged to just any body." She cried a little at that, and, all sympathy, the boy took the girl's hand in his, holding it warmly, and saying:

"I am sorry for you, so sorry! What can I do to help you?"

"Take me somewhere from this place. I can not go back to that house; it is horrible! I was nearly dead with fright when I heard the flower pot fall; then I was so thankful, for it told me there was somebody about, and I made for that side of the house and saw you, and *then* I knew that I was safe."

"Come a little nearer and tell me all about it. Whisper, then it won't wake any one. I'm only here for a night or two, while Dr. Nichols's house is painted. They have gone to stay in Sussex while it's going on, and I have to tell visitors that the doctor will return very shortly. For any very urgent case I have to telegraph directly. I'm going to leave the doctor when they return; the life does not agree with my health. I think it's this close part of London after the country air I have been accustomed to. The doctor promises to try and get me into some other quarter, and, I hope, in some other form of employment. I don't like this. I've told the superintendent at my Sunday-school."

"Good gracious! If you're not bringing that Sunday-school up again."

"Why not? I am happy there, and the superintendent is very kind."

He did not disclose the delicate motives of his wish to get away to more perfect strangers than these relatives of the Blakes, among whom something was ever recurring to remind and sadden. Nor did he enter into his longings for some superior form of life wherein he could acquire knowledge of that great and lofty kingdom of art and letters, whereby he might rise in the world to equality with those of whom poor grandfather had told, yet from whom he was so alienated.

"But I want you to tell me about yourself," he said; "about your being *there*."

"Oh, it's too dreadful!" with a shudder. "It makes me cold to think of. Give me a corner of your blanket, will you, Arthur?"

"You can have another," said the boy, proudly. She wrapped one about her, and cozy enough the pair looked, very like a brace of Esquimaux, in fact. And so the history was whispered, and she saw him start at mention of the Minister, respecting whose personal description and kindness he drank in every word.

"I think you've also met the gentleman who has been so kind to me, who called to see Miss Rose at Dr. Nichols's."

"Oh! Rose is her name? I've not forgotten how nice you look out walking. Well, suppose I *have* met with the same gentleman; you are not jealous?"

"No, Amy, but I'm going to his house in London to-morrow, and I was thinking, if I took you with me, he might find you a home."

"He wanted to do so. I will go with you. I should like to live with him and you all my life."

The sensitive delicacy of the boy was shocked by this candor. He flushed to the brow while saying,

"That would not quite do, you know. But tell me of your escape. First, I think it was the miser himself you heard behind you. I know that he walks in sleep. He has dreadful nights, I believe. Last night, when I went to the window to gaze at my stars, I saw him, and he had a most frightened look, but I can not tell whether he was asleep or awake. The poor old man must be very lonely." Arthur spoke with great sadness. It revived thoughts of another who had been as lonely, but, oh! so different.

"Tell me—why do you go to the window to look at the stars?"

"It is when I am thinking—thinking—thinking! Of a time before ever you knew me."

"Of a happier time?"

"Much happier! When one I loved would pat me on the head, and call me beautiful and good."

"Yes; I have had that time too. Now, I fear, gone forever. But why *your* stars?"

"He first led me up to them, taught me to say prayers to the great God beyond them, explained all their beauty, and told me of all His love. And at those times I learned to look with reverence at the stars, to look upon the sky as home; but since that I have looked—when they were to be seen—with affection, for it seemed his face was watching me; each night before my bed-time."

"And the flowers you think so much of?"

"Are from an old garden you would not care to pluck a piece of wall-flower from, but which is dear to me as dear can be. I brought them here because of the paint. I shall take them wherever I go."

Bright, beautiful boyhood! Tarnished so soon, wounded so often, finding so few to understand it! Alone with its tender instincts, aloof with its loftier poetry, time of the highest hopes and most lovely tunes, of the sweetest dreams and purest thoughts, how beautiful is boyhood!

"And now, what are you to do, Amy? Of course you can't remain here, and all the people are gone to bed." They were quiet trading folk, whom the doctor attended, and often sent lodgers to, when the upper rooms were empty.

"I will just curl up in that arm-chair and go to sleep. I've slept in more chairs than beds in my time, but they haven't all been as comfortable as this. Good-night, Arthur, and thank you."

And before very long she had settled herself as described, and was fast asleep. This pair —motherless, fatherless boy and girl—seemed thrown curiously in each other's way in this city of strange fellowships.

He extinguished the light and drew up the blind. The soft radiance of the starlight fell upon the girl's face, which, turned toward him, with parted lips, down-fallen lashes, and straying locks, looked piquant enough for a kiss. He went and kissed her; but it was in memory of that ideal sister yearned for so long. And when he went to sleep it was with his face turned to those self-same, coldly glittering, unsatisfying, and unanswering stars.

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CHAPTER II.

THE GENTLE PAGE.

Laban Wix, who had been on tour the greater part of the night, opened the door of the chamber to which he invariably returned after his nocturnal wanderings, and screamed harshly down stairs for the girl. She not answering, he went below and explored the whole place, thinking with a shiver of the money advanced upon this missing article. He examined doors and windows, searched the bottle-girdled wall, poked the unredeemed poker into all sorts of dark closets and cupboards, and skipped with a wonderful agility right up the stairs; and finding her not, swore lustily, calling himself by many a violent name for having been weak enough to be taken in.

"I might 'a known she'd be off some night. It was all a do, and yet any body would 'a bin taken in by her."

Having searched for and found the Minister's card, he studied this with some surprise. He had not set foot outside for so long, even the name of the square where the esteemed preacher's residence was situated conveyed no significance of the locality. He believed the child had fled thither, and to ascertain if his supposition was correct, became the difficulty to be surmounted. Leave the shop he could not, and he had nobody to send; but here an idea occurred to him, and he stealthily opened his shutters, shaking with the cold and with his teeth all chattering while his wasted fingers clutched at the iron bars. The few chilly-looking mortals about frowned up at the sign at the corner, and hurried past old Wix as though he had been the devil himself. A coffee merchant wheeled his tin apparatus right to the front of the shop and invited the proprietor to partake of a cup. Mr. Wix turned upon him fiercely:

"I can't afford to buy coffee. Coffee, indeed! I wonder what next, and being robbed wholesale under my own roof!"

The merchant looked sympathetic; he was a red-faced, good-natured-looking fellow. The sight of that redness exasperated the cadaverous Mr. Wix; the good nature galled him; the sympathy caused him to fume to the roots of his scant gray hair.

"Robbed!" echoed the merchant. "Tell us all about it."

Mr. Wix was lowering one of his huge shutters; he pretended to stagger under its weight, and contrived to topple it on to where the head of that merchant would have been had he not leaped over the shaft of his machine. The merchant gave up Laban Wix, Pawnbroker, therewith as a bad one, and would have treated an audience all round with a cup of thick coffee each could they have assembled to view the owner dangling from his own exalted sign.

A cabman came along and shuffled to and fro at the door, handling some cotton pocket-handkerchiefs as though with an idea of purchase. Once within, however, he removed from under his cape an elegant opera-glass, left, probably, in his cab. Mr. Wix was embracing his shutter very tightly when the man entered, and he trotted round with it to the niche where they were kept.

"What's that thing?" cried Wix, clutching greedily at the pearl and gilt trifle. "It's a lantern, ain't it?"

"It's a hopera—you knows well enough."

"Chuck full on 'em—can't get into a room up stairs where they're piled to the ceiling. Don't want it. Naught else?"

The cabman hesitated before restoring it to its concealment.

"Nothing on it, then?"

"Well, you see it's a'most useless; no trade for 'em hereabouts. You'll be driving West presently, and can leave it somewheres. Many on 'em likes taking these things in."

The man made for the door without more pressing, and Mr. Wix, who had all along intended securing the instrument, fearful of losing it, called out:

"Well, to oblige you, as it's a cold morning, and I dessay you've been out all night, I'll do what I can for ye. Let's have a look at it."

This customer was hardly out of the shop when a poor woman entered with her husband's boots. He was sick; these must be surrendered to obtain food. She told a pitiful tale, and the old man listened in silence, and she thought that even Laban Wix's heart was touched; ay, was there not commiseration in the kinder tone? Was he not of all unlikely men about to prove a friend? It seemed so to her sorrowing heart, all clinging to that straw.

"Well, my good woman, I'd like to prove a friend to you if I any way can; sorry for your case, very. Let me see if I can serve you. Can you read?"

"Yes," cried the woman, eagerly; "they used to tell me I read beautifully." A fair light shone on the worn face, a happier expression stole thereon; the old gentleman might be about engaging her to read the paper to him in the evening.

Mr. Wix handed the Minister's card to the woman with the curt query,

"Can you read the title on it? Know where 'tis?"

The woman nodded.

"My little serving-gal has left me without warnin'—taken goodness knows what with her. I know he felt an interest in her—dessay can tell where she is—she may even be at his house. Bring her back, and I've a brand-new shilling not wanted for the business which you're welcome to, upon bringing her back, but not without, not without. I should much like to help you, mum, if I can—very much." He was fumbling the said coin, removed from a small wash-leather bag; it was of a suspicious whiteness, and Laban knew it well to be any thing but silver. He had been biding his time some years, awaiting the opportunity for palming it upon some unfortunate who would have no plea for returning it. Laban was sharer of that sensitiveness common to the isolated—the dread of trouble and dispute.

Very gratefully did the poor woman speed upon her errand, and Laban chuckled to himself over his goodness to the poor.

But when, some time afterward, she returned with news of failure, he became more grave and saturnine, asking hastily if she had not seen the Minister. Oh yes, and he sent his compliments unto Laban Wix, but the child had not been there. He had also heard the woman's tale of poverty, and given her a sovereign to redeem the boots and procure some food for home.

"Confound that fellow!" muttered Laban Wix. "He'd upset all London if he could, and rob the poor an' honest o' their living."

"Don't think so, Master Wix. If there were more like him about, London 'ud be a mighty deal happier nor it is at present."

"Oh, you're like all the rest, turn on the friends o' yer poverty in the day o' yer prosperity. Never knowed a person come into a fortin but it spoiled 'em. But you jist wait till you're down in the world agin, an' see how glad you'll be o' Laban Wix's!"

The woman hurried from the place with a shudder; to another home, which the Minister's charity, and cheering words more valuable than charity, had rendered sunny for the hour.

In candid truth Mr. Garland was pleased at the information this woman's call conveyed, for it announced to him the child's escape; whither was for the time unknown, but it was evident she had made good her escape from pawn.

"Another quaint episode to add to my life-chronicles! The generous-hearted and humane may well live on, live double lives and be in town and country both, so urgent is the need for friendly aid and sympathy on every hand. I pray *mine* are sheltered at this time by some fostering care, in memory of those I shelter! Loved wife and darling child, where are you now? And what sore retribution hath fallen on my head—that head which conceived the doubtful wisdom of this daring course, daily imminent with dread, and pregnant with discovery? But a little while, my Ella, a little while, and him whom you proudly loved, graced and honored by fair fame, you shall love again, no cloud veiling the light in truthful eyes, no shadow on the brow or in the home. I feel sometimes as if, should we meet by accident, it would be more than my strength could bear; and Ella—the effect of such surprise on her would be most fatal. I must guard her from this, although how to do so with no clew to their whereabouts is the problem I would solve. Once do this, I will, by Lady Guilmere's aid, break the truth to her—it must be gently broken; but my greatest dread is that some ill chance may bring my loved ones to the South."

Mr. Garland was disturbed from this reverie by his servant informing him that a young gentleman wished to know if it was convenient to see him, and the Minister felt glad.

"Yes; admit him." He had invited the boy, being impressed by his manners. *He* knew the boy's deep longing, the aspiration for better things, the exquisite dreaming never told to a mortal. He read it all in the large eyes beneath darkly pencilled brows, eyes that seemed weighted by the mystic eloquence which is language only to a few, and he traced by outline of the physique the slumbering genius of the soul. Often he had met this gentle lad accompanying an old white-haired man bent and bowed, yet whom he believed to have seen better days, and to whom, as was evident, this boy flashed all the sunshine, laughed all the music the life had known; and because of this he had never offered to place the child in the path to better fortune, although the project had lain next his heart for months. But Westley Garland did not press his sympathy where likely to cause pain, or when inopportune. He waited, and somehow the time always came. He was too delicate and thoughtful even to hint that the boy might be better provided for; he said no word beyond a kindly greeting when he met them on the wide tract of Downland. Then he had the mortification of seeing his own thought and forethought circumvented altogether, and the boy whom he would have placed at school taken into service, to a good home, he admitted, but not to the life he would have chosen. And then the boy was removed to the home in town, which Garland thought as objectionable as the other. Hence this invitation for some quiet talk together.

But now came a surprise, the boy timidly telling his friend all that had transpired. He had left the girl outside in the square, until he knew if it was agreeable to Mr. Garland that she should be admitted; and he felt very happy at the Minister's manifest approval. Mr. Garland sent him for the child at once, and she was brought in blushing with pleasure. Arthur had expended his slender stock of money upon the pretty hat and jacket which rendered her presentable. For the rest she appeared as on the previous evening, and Westley Garland looked upon her with a large measure of pity.

"You did not think to see me so soon," he said, with his most tender smile, bending toward her and taking the curl-clustered head between his hands, while looking down thoughtfully. She was so different to his snow-flake. "Yes, my child, we will indeed see if a more suitable home than that from which you have fled is open to so defenseless a one. Now run and make friends with my housekeeper, I want to talk a while with your protector."

Thus auspiciously was Amy installed in the Minister's good graces. With a little trembling, and half breathlessly, Arthur heard this kind remark, for now that the moment had come it seemed such wondrous boldness upon his part to be sitting in the presence of this great man. Arthur entertained the awe sensitive and shrinking boyhood experiences when alone with some one eminent and honored. He had heard the doctor say that this famous Minister had no equal in the matter of popularity; and he remembered a night of his preaching in town, how he had heard the church doors were beset by a crowd that began to assemble long before they were opened; how aisles were thick with standing men and women, while many stood without, catching but the echoes, yet clinging to these greedily; and how, after the service, he had walked to the vestry, with downcast eyes and pensive thought, yet with a majesty that was unapproachable, and the crowd had moved forth with a slow reluctance, and backward-turning eyes, hoping for another glimpse of their favorite, and stood outside in groups, upon the chance of seeing him again when passing to his carriage; how, when he knew of this, he would not keep one soul a minute waiting through vanity, but thought of the danger from the night air to those thus waiting, and walked gravely down the church, accompanied by the wardens, bowing kindly and shaking hands with many, until he reached the pavement, where the police kept back the pressure. Glancing half nervously to right or left, not liking the publicity and scarcely understanding it, and sitting back in his carriage while the servant mounted to the box beside his coachman, and just before driving off inclining his head slightly, in recognition of the homage, but with a tender smile, an exquisite grace, the crowd counted it well worth the waiting for. All this the boy had heard with feelings of timorous wonder, forming of the Minister a godlike, ideal hero, as boyhood will, not feeling he could *love* this wondrous man—he was too far removed for that, and the boy felt too great awe for love to be possible—but experiencing that touching devotion which renders even contact with the garments a thrilling moment that is almost pain. Thus when the preacher first spoke to him simply and kindly as might any man, nay, kinder than had any save one, now dead, Arthur knew what it was for the heart to stand still with dread and gladness, with hot yet cold excitement, tumultuous yet suppressed emotion. A feeling of temporary trouble, much lessened when the preacher deigned to notice him again, to lay his hand all tenderly upon the curly head, thinking, perchance, he had no son, but would have liked a son so gentle, and yet again when came the invitation to this friendly talk. The awe had not worn off; it seemed so great a condescension it was difficult to realize it all at once; himself, an atom, in the presence of this king in thought and popularity. He scarcely dared to lift his eyes to the calm face graven of trouble; tried almost to forget this moment had come; waited, hardly breathing, for the opening word. Spoken softly as a mother might speak, by him who had seen it all, "Come here, my child."

The boy went to him trembling, and he just drew the trembler on to his knee, and kissed him upon the brow.

Arthur could not bear much; this was so unexpected, he burst into tears.

He felt dreadfully sorry to have done so, but could not help it. The Minister did not attempt to check him; he knew the relief of tears to hearts that are overcharged; and those tears were higher tribute to this man than all the waiting crowds that had stood so often and so long. When calmer, the Minister talked to him, until the eyes sparkled, and the cheeks flushed, and Arthur was no more afraid; yea, knew that he had here a friend even to the death. Mr. Garland certainly did not belong to the class who recognize nothing lower than palm-trees in the world.

Cool moss is thick and sweet each side the humble flower the long dry summer through; the wind blows the waving grass to shelter it from harm; the trample of straying kine is close, but crushes instead the bleached stalk, useless, unlovely; the great bee which falls with cruel weight upon such slender things, buzzes past to the mound of wild thyme; the butterfly, even, with so gentle a theft, floats on the sunbeam hence; above it, is a slant roof of dock-leaf that carries off the rain-drops during rain-fall. They who inspect little nearer than stars or lower than palm-trees may sneer blandly at the humble thing watched over and cared for in its unnoticed way.

Who could tell but this boy would be one of the brotherhood whose fancy changes tedious hours to winged minutes, banishes memory of pain, hangs the world round with pictures; the thinkers who make wiser and better and brighter by their thought; who produce the great lasting work and leave their imperishable mark upon the ages; who educate the world and train thought itself; who gather the materials of the earth, of life, and of nature into essences for the strengthening of souls; whose names are enscrolled in the archives of those to whom mankind owes the deepest debt—the debt children take of their fathers, and bequeath again for a sacred observance?

An encouraging word may sometimes mould a whole future destiny; the consciousness of a life's friend may make a character.

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CHAPTER III.

AN ARTIST'S WOODLAND HOME.

When that luxurious Byronic art patron, Frank Lord Ellerby, gave shelter to beautiful Bohemia, he only obeyed instincts and followed idealisms that had been through life a guiding influence; and no more powerful instance of this had occurred than was afforded by that memorable beauty quest which led to his finding a very charming partner. A spoiled child of fortune, accustomed from cradledom to possess every thing he set his mind upon, he yet was naturally so refined this license had never been abused, and it may be affirmed in all candor that his lordship was as innocent as it is possible for a man and an artist to remain in that world to which the Rev. Sydney Smith so delicately drew attention.

Yet his lordship had never once thought of the possibility of his young wife objecting to the woodland studio. Indeed, if his lordship wished to have a studio in every wood in Europe, it might never have occurred to him that it was just possible such a proceeding would be rated, if artistic, as improper. He had known men give up the meet and forswear steeple-chasing owing to their necks becoming so much more valuable; but then his neck was not in danger. He had also known men quarrel with their club; but he didn't belong to a club. He was all art; it was the first principle of his life; and he would as soon have thought of breaking up the establishment in Brighton or Paris as that exquisite nest among the fragrant pines.

Indeed, he loved this retreat from the world of fashion and gayety, with its gems from French *salons* and rarest specimens of native talent, leaving out altogether the far from obscure work of his own; where Gérôme was sensuously classical, and Gallait grandly historical; Jules Breton's pastorals side by side with some masterpiece of Meissonier's, and the rich glow upon Italian studies contrasting with the severe purity of the Northern school. Perhaps he had now and again thought, if but one of the lovely creations crowding the gallery beneath the cones would but come to life upon his bidding, how pleasant it might be! But he had fastidious notions, and if likely to upset his place, interfere with the hangings, or pass remarks upon those specimens not designed for the eyes of the vulgar (even resuscitated vulgar, around whom a halo had been shed while on the canvas), why, then he would leave them as they were, in their frames, quiet and inoffensive, and always charming.

When "Walter" glided upon the scene, delicately as if woven of shreds of starlight, beautiful as any Ganymede that ever tended flocks on Ida, daintily sensitive, and all shrinking like one of those tender hues wherewith he painted some veiled Aurora, yet possessed of that indescribable charm which is the seal set upon birth, then the artist felt that the picture long thought of had to some extent taken form, and the familiar of his flights into cloud-land had descended among the firs, as in old legends of German woods told by some pretty peasant, while he leisurely sketched the scene. He was almost surprised into mournfulness by that softness of beauty, chaste as the softness of pathos in marble; he was caught and enslaved in the toils of an elegant admiration, slight as a lace-work of ivory; he was charmed by this rare picture of nature, that stood forth as though carved upon agate, and in his artistic fashion he endowed this high relief with grace that was haughtily sweet; and whether as goat boy of the Tyrol, or gondolier's son of Maggiore, or what else it might be his pleasure to depict, that idealism was there. In Lord Ellerby's opinion the melancholy did not in the least detract from the beauty, or take one gleam from the light of that face. Cypress in marble is lovely as orange flower beneath the tinting from mediæval windows, and this idealist knew well that troubled music blooms in the heart of many a song. The chief wonder appeared to be how "Walter" could have preserved this delicate refinement through all that had occurred. Lord Ellerby had heard the story of her birth, and was profoundly interested; and he thought it no wonder that the child was sad. "What a world this is!" he said to himself, while adding the finishing touches to one of those studies wherein the fugitive played pathos and shed soul. "What strains float and linger, and fade and die, all unknown and unheard, day after day; blown hither and thither like torn blossoms in an orchard during time of storm, sensitive and pure as shreds of silver in the sea! I like this boy's eyes, that might wear the tender splendor of dead love, that *do* leap to flame beneath the higher thought when I talk to him of art; his hands, that lie in my own with no unfeeling cold white beauty, but that wear in their palm the warm bloom which means so much in pressure; that cool languor, like some crystal lake with myriad unstirred depths; those tears when he weeps as regal women weep, with tears that are jewels upon sorrow that is queenly. Will He who shelters the flower seed dropped into the darkness, and brings it forth in sunlight a blossom of fair splendor, forget this rarer flower fallen in loveliness so helpless and unprotected? I think not; any way, he shall never want a friend in Ellerby. He can remain here; it is a quiet, secluded home for him; some day I will send on one of these pictures to Brighton, just to see what Flora thinks of it. The fellows will be awfully jealous. It will be, 'Ellerby has unearthed a treasure somewhere!' and, 'By-the-bye, where's Frank Ellerby's studio? I want to find out, if I can, whether this new face is from the life, or one of his erratic dreams.' Oh yes, they'll be nicely put about, but I'll keep this to myself."

This was all very well and charmingly ideal so far as it went and so long as they were alone; but that day when Lena came in with "Walter" a new period commenced, a peculiarly dangerous period, for of course to admire "Walter" was to love Lena; and in a confidential whisper to himself the artist admitted, with characteristic drollery, "Some fellows say they have been looking all their life for the beautiful, and can't find it; but I seem to stand the chance of having too much of it in my artistic career."

Lord Ellerby was in his choicest retreat when the pupil was seen walking down the wooded lane accompanied by a girl, and from the distance a pretty girl. The walls were lined with them, pedestals surmounted by the most exquisite beauty human mind was capable of conceiving, the very windows stained with fair saint-faces that rebuked the classic license. The carton-pierre painting that served for decoration was set with the daintiest heroines of the poets. He looked round the chamber contentedly, looked out to the shady lane dissatisfied; he did not approve of disciples running wild and picking up strange nymphs—not allowed in Attica, and why here? He resolved to model his academy upon severely classic precedent, and with accustomed negligent grace sauntered forth to ascertain the meaning.

"Walter" blushingly brought forward her companion, who was not blushing, but gazing with full and undisguised admiration at the handsome painter. Willie Arden—well, Willie Arden was not forgotten, and never would be, no matter what number of handsome painters she encountered upon her way.

"Who is this, young Sir?" inquired his lordship, kindly.

"The young lady is tired with walking, Sir, and faint with hunger. I felt sure you would allow her to sit down and rest a while."

"Certainly I will, and see that refreshment restores her strength before she leaves us. This is Hospitality Hall, my dear" (to Lena), "and we suffer no wayfarers like yourself to pass whenever we can extend our kindness. Come in, and the maid shall show you to a chamber where you may remove the dust clouding your pretty hair," lifting the luxuriant blown tresses hanging about her wild as some bewitching gypsy's.

Lena thought all this very pleasant, and a most agreeable change, and she obeyed his injunctions to the letter. She returned shortly, looking about her curiously, for this bachelor Parisian abode was as different as possible to the chaste magnificence of the House upon the Cliff. But Lena was entirely innocent, and construed no wrong of these poetic studies; wondered a little, perhaps, and may have thought next time she met Willie Arden she would press the allegory of Men and Maids.

"Welcome to an idle painter's workshop, young lady!" was her host's merry greeting, as, hearing her step upon the stair, "Walter" opened the door, and the artist raised himself a little upon his luxuriant couch, and laid down the long Persian pipe he was smoking, which recalled St. Aubyn to her mind. The child almost loved this smoker for the resemblance; the fragrance of the Eastern weed revived memory of old rooms at home. Well, she felt to be on the way now, and what a string of adventures to tell the dear one to whom she was returning! And she thought she must be quick about the journey, or he would arrive home first. And once or twice she thought how pleasant it would be to have this charming boy, who had been so good a friend, to accompany her upon the way. She would give much could St. Aubyn but see his fair girl face.

Upon a side-table refreshments of a light and tempting kind were in waiting, and the artist placed her at ease by saying:

"My 'Walter' here was just about to have his luncheon; I am sure you will assist him at his task."

"I shall be glad to," said Lena, simply, "for I'm most wonderfully hungry."

The artist looked keenly at the speaker through a blue-gray cloud. The words might have proceeded from some one of the vagrant *gamins* with sloe-like eyes and raven locks among whom he had scattered bonbons on the wharf or landing-stage by the Seine, but the voice was musical and proud with all its childishness.

The girl and boy-girl sat opposite one another, eating and eying each other's face and movements very much as you may see a pair of half-shy, half-bold, and altogether pretty kittens over a plate of milk; the chamber redolent with aroma of the woods, with fragrance of the artist's clouds, and with odor from basins, where founttains played perfumed waters over rocks and feathery fern.

"You are not asked to tell us any thing about yourself, young lady, because you accept our hospitality; but if you like to do so, we lend an attentive ear; and remember, please, if we can be of any service, it will give us pleasure." Said without effort and with so much genial *bonhomie* and frank sincerity, Lena replied instantly; and it was so amazing a reply the artist removed the pipe from his mouth and looked long and earnestly at this venturesome little pilgrim:

"I've been walking about London all night, and now have set forth upon the road to York."

"Good gracious! What a queer idea! But do you mean what you are saying?"

"It is true. I came from home yesterday morning to see London, and I have seen it, and don't think much of it. More than that, I am *disappointed.* I've been looking all the time for a real lord or lady, and I don't believe I've seen one yet."

The artist smiled kindly. "I suppose you do not often make these little explorations?"

"I have never been away from home before. I dare say I shall get into a pretty bother through being away now."

"Well, if you belonged to me, I should very much object to it. By-the-bye, whom *do* you belong to, if not too bold a question?"

"To Mr. Ashton St. Aubyn, of the House upon the Cliff."

"And in what part of the world may the Cliff be situated?"

"In Yorkshire—whither I am going as soon as ever I can."

"I thought my acquaintance with cliffs was pretty general, but it seems I have yet to learn. Do I understand you are absent 'without leave?'"

"Oh yes, I dared not do so if—if papa knew. He is very particular."

"Well, you have taken a wrong step to begin with. And how may it have fared with you?"

"Roughly. I don't want to do it again."

"Then the lesson hath done good!" and the speaker smiled to her over the morality. "When you have finished your lunch come here, for I want to have a good look at you."

She walked over to him, hanging her head with pretended penitence, but looking from out the corners of her eyes with irresistible wickedness. And he looked long, kindly, and thoughtfully, and then said, with comical perplexity:

"I want to scold you, but I don't know how; and I suspect if I did it wouldn't do you much good."

"Not a bit! I've been scolded lots of times, and it never does me any good."

"Well, you strike me as being an original. I wonder what Lady Flora would think of you."

"Lady Flora—really Lady Flora?"

"Yes, really. A lady I know in Brighton."

"Where is Brighton? Is it far?"

"Not very."

"I should like to go—like to see Lady Flora."

"I'm afraid if you were to go, and under my chaperonage, it would create some commotion. You would cause almost as much excitement as did my friend Lady Helen."

"Lady Helen—Lady Flora—what a lot of ladies you seem to know! I should think you would be the very one to let me see some of them."

"It is not such an extraordinary request, and I am not aware that there is any great difficulty attending it. But I thought you were in such a hurry to return home?"

"So I am. I am always wanting two things at once. I should like your 'Walter' to go a little way with me, if you do not mind."

"What! Run away with my pupil? A pretty thing!"

"Is he your pupil? How I wish I could teach something, for I should like to have a pupil like that!"

"I dare say you would. One of your most happy lessons, I imagine, would be to teach him how to love."

"I hope you are not going to launch forth upon one of Mrs. Brandon's themes?"

"I have not the honor of knowing Mrs. Brandon."

"She lives with us, takes care of me, and gives lectures, gratis, upon Love."

"What a funny girl you are! Uncultivated as a young colt. You want breaking in, you know."

"I should like to see some one attempt it with me. But upon cultivation I beg to correct you, Sir; I will speak to you in Hindustani, Hindi, Sanscrit, Persian, Bengali, Arabic, Teeloogoo, Tamil, Guzrattee, Mahratta, and Malay."

"Now I beg you won't. But where on earth did you pick up all those heathenish languages?"

"At home. Papa understands those and a lot more, and he amuses himself with drumming them into me; but I'm not a very apt pupil, I'm afraid. Would you like to try me?"

"No, thank you. I don't know any thing I could teach you; it seems to me you already know too much."

"Teach me as you are teaching 'Walter'—to draw and paint. Oh! if I could but do that, I should be so happy!"

"I shall be pleased to make you happy, then; but remember, if Ashton St. Aubyn, your papa, of the House upon the Cliff, wants explanation and satisfaction, it's your affair, not mine. Of course you can stop as long as you like. Since I've commenced a *pension*, I may as well extend its operations to the utmost. Perhaps, now, you have some friend you'd like to join you at your studies?" with playful and pleasant irony.

"Yes," cried the girl, quickly; "Sir Dickson Cheffinger."

"Another friend of yours I have not the privilege of being acquainted with. The only Cheffinger I know is Claude Cheffinger of the Abbey. That's a painting of the old place, yonder, in the carved oak frame; mark the deer in the park—finest herd in the kingdom. I said to Cheffinger one day, when staying with a party at the Abbey, 'If ever you part with the estates, let me have the deer.' He turned disagreeable, I remember. Of course I only meant it as a joke; but they certainly are matchless; one of the half-untamed species rapidly becoming extinct; just look at that fellow barking the ash with his antlers. I never tasted venison like that upon the table at Cheffinger."

It seemed so strange, the name now familiar to her being bandied about like this; she looked at the painting with much interest.

"And you did that?"

"I did."

"Then teach me; I would copy that for Sir Dickson."

"Whatever for? To tantalize? Nay, but you must abandon all such mischievous practices before becoming my pupil."

Presently he asked, "What name are you known by? What am I to call you?"

"Lena, please."

"Would you like to go round and look at the pictures, Lena? I shall be busy for an hour or two upon the canvas."

"I should, very much; and may 'Walter' explain?"

"To be sure." And as the two went off, roaming his "arbor of the arts," as he sometimes called this *bijou* home, he said to himself, "As interesting a pair of foundlings as one might desire Arcadia to provide. I'll sit down before getting to my picture, and write Flora all about it."

And he did so; wrote a humorous and slightly impassioned letter descriptive of events, and the beauty of his "brace of pupils," closing with terms of warm endearment addressed to his young, flower-like wife, and an artistic flourish to his signature, "Frank." He read this over, read it again, read it as one might read it in Flora's place, and, tearing it up, sat down to write another; and wrote another, commencing with terms of warm endearment addressed to his young wife; these grew cooler toward the centre, where he cautiously felt the way with, "And now I am going to tell you of a most romantic occurrence which will interest you more than any part of my letter, and which, when you see some studies I am working upon, will rouse your wish to see the originals." Then, some dozen lines further, this diverged into a slightly impassioned description, closing with terms of great enthusiasm, depicting the beauty of his "brace of pupils," and an additionally artistic flourish to his signature, "Frank;" and he read this over, read it again, read it as one might read who was not artistically enthusiastic, and tore this up also. Then over the tobacco he recited this moral: "The Ancients preserved knowledge of accidents; among Moderns, preservation is an accident of knowledge. Through all time man hath shown his greatest wisdom when knowing least. I will be silent, until by word of mouth I can reply to all the innumerable questions my letter would bring, and which a complete system of Reuter and letters voluminous as the *Times* would be unable to embrace." After this he set to work upon his painting with vigor, and did some splendid work between the morn and the meridian.

Meanwhile Zephyrus and Chloris were happy amidst the poems spelt from spice-wood rafters to the wainscot, and the ingenious vivacity of the one found its echo of companionship in the settled charm of manner of the other. One knew so much; the other knew so little. Each possessed attraction for the other; the manners of each were so gently winning, so innocent and lovable.

"Walter" stood by Lena, who was sitting upon a couch, examining some antique cabinet china upon a table, beside which she had placed herself.

"These are very pretty, you know. I never saw any thing like this before."

"Have you not? I should have thought you had lived in the midst of such all your life, you are so delicate."

"Oh, do you think so? Mrs. Brandon used to tell me I was more like a boy than a girl, rolling about the floor, and bird-nesting on the Cliff."

A deep color had dyed the other's cheek, noticing which Lena exclaimed,

"How pretty you are when you blush, just for all the world like a piece of this!" She was indicating a superb *Grès de Flandres*, the gem of the collection.

"My life has for years been little better than that of the poor ones of whom you have just told me—I mean those who so interested you last night in Covent Garden. Think what it is to be the common apprentice of the common circus."

"What is a circus? Tell me."

"A tanned ring, round a high pole, supporting a canvas roof, which forms a movable building. This is transported from place to place for the amusement of the people. Horses canter round, and riders, male and female, go through feats of horsemanship, while jesters and buffoons make the audience laugh. That is a circus."

"Thank you; I am wiser than before you commenced. I think I should rather like it; so that's the difference between us. What did you have to do?"

"Ride like the rest—sometimes alone, sometimes in company."

"And haven't you done any thing else? Been articled to a firm of solicitors, for instance?"

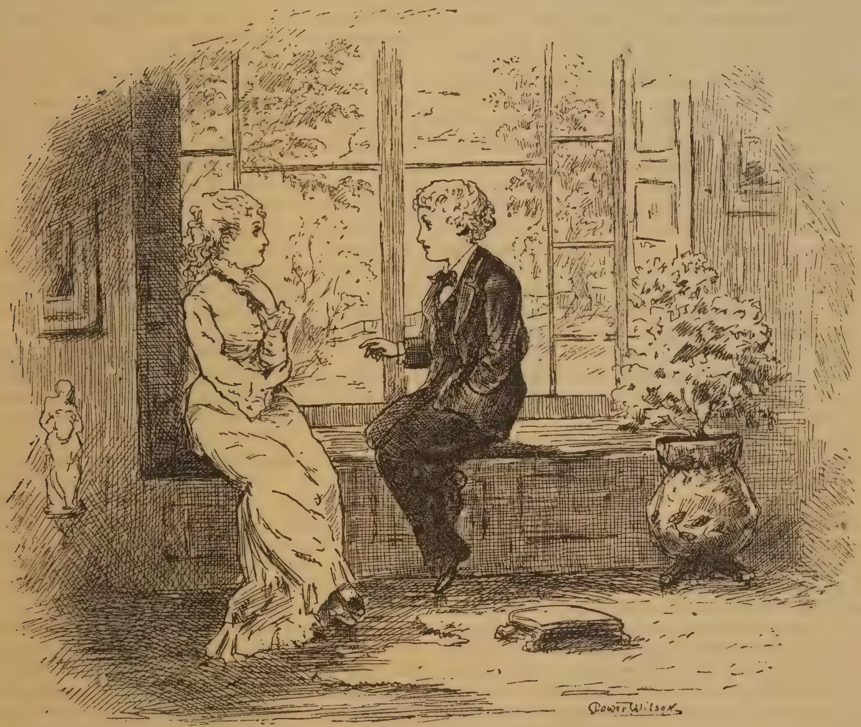
"No," answered the other, with an alarmed look. "Why do you ask that question?"

"Because it is very strange." And she repeated from memory: "'A fair-faced, delicate youth, with blonde curls short to the head; a slight, symmetrical figure; small white hand; timid, shrinking manner, very sensitive; age between fourteen and fifteen; and answers to name of Walter Gordon.' If that isn't your portrait, my name isn't Lena St. Aubyn!" And she triumphantly transfixed her victim.

"Walter" stood discovered, and by this exquisite detective, whom she was half disposed to embrace, yet with something of a scare at heart, although outwardly quiet.

"Well, I'm not going to be hard upon you, 'Walter,' because, goodness knows, I may be in the same shoes myself. Now you go back home; you're to be let off, and to be a good boy, and never do it again; only you must first agree to give me up the papers belonging to Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and, second, to give me a real, genuine kiss. I was defrauded of one the other day by my friend Willie Arden, so perhaps you'll make up for it."

"Walter" made up for it, and Lena sat considering—comparing, as it were—then she said:



"AWAY IN THE QUIETEST OF THE ROOMS BY THE WINDOW."

"Seems to me there's something wanting. I don't blame you, 'Walter.' You did your part very well, but somehow I am not quite satisfied."

"I shouldn't think there can be much that is wanting. *You* have a good, kind papa, but what have I to live for?"

"Well, I suppose we live for other things besides good, kind papas; or at all events I do."

What a play of cross-purposes it was! And "Walter" felt grieved by that, so apparent, heartlessness.

"And don't you," she asked, "remember either of your parents?" Thinking how much alike were their fortunes.

"Yes; I well remember my haughty mother, whose studied grace of movement and majestic carriage were the terror of my early years. I dared not love her; I am not quite sure that she loved me. It is my father I think of most, because he was so lovable although so grand. Have you ever read of King Solomon?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever try to think what he was like?"

"No."

"I have often thought my father like King Solomon, for he was wise and wealthy, beautiful and gracious."

"My papa is thoughtful, and I know he is rich, yes, and beautiful, and gracious; so I think mine will do for King Solomon as well as yours."

Mere idle chatterers in an artist's woodland home, mere gossips met in fairy-land, unconscious and unknown. How the summer rose leaves fall upon each other's path with careless splendor, yet perhaps with symmetry, ruled by an all-presiding hand! How the silver grains are shifted by each rippling current when angle is to angle awkward, yet fitting by the after-flow of time and tide until in exquisite proportion!

"And your mamma?" asked "Walter."

"My picture, I am afraid, is similar in this. I can not recall much love, but instead, a calm and tranquil lady, haughty, cold, and cruel; bitter of word and freezing in manner, but so beautiful! Even like some empress of a court of great magnificence."

They wandered through room after room, one understanding about as much as the other of art and the priceless worth of the paintings they looked upon; but one understanding very much of the significance of theme and subject hidden from the child-like innocence of the other.

And when the artist discovered the pair, it was not before one of the fine conceptions that were his pride and pleasure, but sitting away in the quietest of the rooms by the window, and looking out thoughtfully upon the trees thinned of foliage, upon the array of divers-colored leaves spread as a carpet, upon a vista of bared branches that shone gray and fawn and leaden upon the lane leading thence to the highway for the north. And Lena was just saying, "I do so wish you would go with me!" when the artist merrily intruded:

"That's it, you see; trying to rob me of my pupil. Now that is not fair."

Lena rose with inimitable seriousness, and advancing a step with playful indecision, yet with a gleam of the old imperious firmness which in the House upon the Cliff had been predominant, she said:

"'Walter' has told me you are a lord, really and truly. Please may I look at you here in the light?"

"What, you have found one, then, at last! Ah, well, you do not find me so very distinct a being from a gentleman, I hope?"

"I've not had time enough to tell yet. It takes longer acquaintance to find that out."

"Quite a philosopher!"

"I ought to be. I've had some precious lessons."

"Talking of lessons, I am going to take you for a drive to see some paintings."

"I've seen enough to last me all my life, thank you."

"The paintings I speak of are different to my poor collection. You shall see one of the famous galleries of London."

"I would rather not go back to London. I must be making for home when I do set forth."

"Then you won't go for a drive with me?"

"I don't mind if 'Walter' goes." And she added to herself, "I've had a great wish to sit in a carriage, just once."

After luncheon she heard a couple of prancing horses on the gravel drive, and from the window saw the creatures—a handsome pair, that seemed to champ and neigh with delight at the prospect of a long chase over dry, hard roads. Then Ellerby seated his visitors opposite to him on the luxurious side, girt in with bear-skins, their feet in warmth of Russian foxes, looking so lovely, he rested back at ease, revelling, as was his wont, before such sweet visions; not even remarking a gray-bearded patriarch of impressive mien who held open the gate at the entrance of the lane. It was Jael-Ishmael, king over gypsy tribes in England, and from below the palmer hat his keenly glittering eyes shone like sparks of fire. The venerable form was erect as one of the poplars of the plantation, and did not bend while the artist-lord drove past, but took swift glance from right to left above the bear-skins, the last gaze while the carriage drove through lingering upon Somebody's daughter.

And then the ancient walked with dignity to the camp of a tribe of his people, picturesquely situated among the tree trunks that columned their retreat, and canopied a fretwork of gray and of fawn and of leaden.

The people formed a rude circle round a fire (where, by-the-bye, the poetical caldron was conspicuous by its absence, for their chief was far too fastidious to permit cooking messes when he was in the woods).

A stable rug was thrown over a heap of brush and thicket, and he sat thereon.

"Esther! Hath Esther sold of her ware?"

A woman of striking beauty approached. She wore a large red cloak that partially covered a basket upon her arm, which appeared stocked with the usual merchandise of the country haberdasher. She merely stood before him awaiting his bidding.

"Hast reduced thy store, my daughter?"

She stooped, taking up a card of linen buttons from which some dozens had been cut; a small tray of needle packets, rows of blue-papered pins which she unrolled, displaying different lengths; flat folds of Valenciennes lace, pieces of tape, and some woolen cuffs. One by one displayed reduction in their quantity.

"It is well. What more?"

She stooped yet lower, with the upper division of her basket removed. There were ear-rings and rings, brooches and necklets, pins and guards, lockets and charms, and all the array of mock jewelry precious to the unsophisticated mind ruralward. Each card she displayed showed some removal or other. But while bending over these she was not talking of this prosperous success, but whispered:

"*The bolt upon the kitchen door can be reached by a long arm through the small window opposite the dove-cot. The inner kitchen door has a lock, no bolt.*"

"Thou hast done well, my daughter!" The woman replaced her ware and moved silently back to her station, where a little one was asleep, his head pillowed upon an ass, and his chubby arm about its neck.

Meanwhile the carriage party was enjoyably *en route.* Anon, Kensington was reached, and they strolled for an hour among the paintings. The attendance was not large, but select. Ellerby, naturally, was interested in one or other of the artists—known or unknown to him—who were at their studies before the great canvas from which they copied; and they came upon one of these, an elder at his art, who, intent upon his work, and busied guiding a boy-pupil at his side, did not look up at their approach, knowing well if he looked up at every curious body prying at his work, he might do nothing more. But the boy did so, and with a sunny face—itself more glorious than any picture in that gallery—and started from his chair to grasp the hand of "Walter," who, flushing a hundred pretty hues, was not less pleased.

And while Lord Ellerby shook hands with an old friend and interchanged the compliments, "Walter" stood by that friend's pupil, when many hurried questions were replied to, and Lorry was introduced to Lena, who thought to herself wonderingly whether any two boys upon the earth could be at once more opposite, more handsome, than the two before her. And Lorry, with pretty manner and a breeding peculiarly his own, made friends with Lena.

"I say," said Ellerby to "Walter," "what a one you are! You will make my gallery a numerical success anyhow. You must return and dine with us," he added, to his friend, who readily assented. A pleasant ride back. The old friends chatting upon art, the young friends upon nature. Lorry sat by "Walter," and the two were soon engaged in more earnest conversation. There was much to be told; and even Lorry's surprise at thus suddenly encountering the original of the portrait in his possession did not restrain his eagerness to learn all that had befallen "Walter" in the mean time. He did not approve of his friend's refuge, and considered the pursuit of art under existing circumstances slightly a mistake, and said so. When "Walter" answered, with innocent candor, "After all I have gone through, this home, this life, is the perfection of happiness!"

"Yes, but at the farm you will have one of your own sex for company, and a kind, motherly lady into the bargain."

"That is of less moment to me than you would imagine. It is protection and consideration I need and value most. This privacy is very welcome, and I might not enjoy it at the farm."

So Master Lorry was troubled; his great beautiful eyes scanned the other's face with loving anxiety, and he half wished this captivating wanderer had never crossed his path. "It's a trouble to be fond of a girl when she is a girl, but when she's a boy it's positively unsettling!" Thus said the young philosopher to himself, his dark cheek tingling beneath Lena's openly admiring gaze.

Later on, Lord Ellerby's friend returned to town. Lorry accepted an invitation to remain and spend the morrow with them.

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CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE NIGHT'S WORK.

The great gray bridge was cold and grim as the stone of a line of mausoleums. Below, the river, sable as Styx, glided as bearing freightage of the dead; a barge-like trail of clouds above, keeping course with the sluggish stream—slowly, gradually, composedly passing on and away to a dim and mystical beyond. A weird fancy comes to one who is leaning elbows on the bridge, watching the dark old stream—a strangely vivid fancy with its accompaniment of phantom shapes, its pageant of gray pain, its layer upon layer of startling story. Suppose the ooze and mud of Thames to be giving up its secrets, the revelation of the river for the first time disclosed, and what records would be read in the procession of memories thus laid bare! An imaginary picture merely, yet full of strange suggestiveness.

Tide back the water for a season, far above bridges there! Ay, let vessels ground a while, and traffic of the night be stayed! Bring cunning men with line and plummet, and pick and spade, and barrow and basket; clear off the mud and filth, tenderly wash white faces, deal gently with the matted splendor of blonde and brown that fathers have twined lovingly; bring cloths, and ewers of ware and of silver, and water scented of roses; dip the hands reverently, and lave with tenderness, till rings glide off and the colorless almonds flush; bring carrion carts and pageantry of the pest-house; bring trays for the jewels and caskets for the treasures; we will burnish these, learn of the dead gold graven of tears! Bring scavengers to clear the garbage strata; bring cushions of snowy velvet, with blossoms to scatter o'er the infants, and choicest weavings of your looms to gird about the children. These bitter winds pierce chill to-night between the arches of the bridge. Bring archives of old times, for deep down are men who have been there a thousand years or more; and deeper yet are relics of the days when savages fought on these banks, for teeth of beasts—a hideous company. One can see them crouching for the rush, gliding with sinewy movement, lithe, lank limbs and blood-sodden fangs, at their prowling, ravenous sports, at their coiling, unclean minuet upon the banks where wharfage now rears another forest. Bring savants here to-night, men of science, intimate with the extinct ages, historians and men of museums, to whom a fossil is a treasure. There is much here, and other than geology. Bring sappers and miners, borers, and those who excavate, diggers and delvers also, and the skilled hands that tunnel their native clay. There is work here; the two thousand years' residuum has to be cleared by morning! Clever men of the note-book come, for to-morrow all the city shall be startled hearing of this. Carefully now, if you please. Is there a chemist at our elbow? Good fellow, search the pharmacy for that which will add bloom to these young cheeks. We have sponged off the crust of this foul stream, and see, there is *beauty;* are there means of restoring the color? Long before Ishmael scattered desert roses among the swart girls charmed by the splendor of his face, this child played her boy-warrior false; centuries before Tiber witnessed the cradledom of Rome, this beauty, more savage than her wolf-cub playmates, floated acorn fleets hereon, and plunged all her ruddy swoop of limb on chase adown the stream. Lay these cold, brown lines of loveliness in symmetry one with another; they were straggling all awry in that grimy bed, and a horrid reptile of noisome breed nestled on the tawny, wet, bruised bosom. There are strange contrasts here to-night! Place it beside this sister of our later day, who has scarcely felt the cruel blow of the water strike her eyelids a cycle of the hours. Mark the small cross at her throat, the flower-like, pretty face, the skin snow blue as wintry clouds; loop the locks up lovingly. A mother ere this has taken the tired head on knee, and wound the hank of auburn silk for slumber. We will erect no grisly morgue this night; the recovered of the Thames shall have a fairer housing; the echo of the dirge died with its ebb and flow, pæan of awakened life shall chime in the dawn to each. List! even now there creeps upon us, as we lean upon the bridge, echo of girl laughter, glad, and like ringing of jewels, and it comes from the house far up the river, with laced windows to the lawn, where a nest of a chamber is shadowed by flowers all the length of the summer days; and we see this young fair love, radiant on her birthday morn, sunbeams kissing, odorous breaths of the flowers all fanning her beauty; and a grave man, bent by the city life, and stern with long years of law, but of a wonderful tenderness this day when alone with her. She is to have any thing, even to the half of his kingdom of love, and the river is chosen; a row upon the lazy, playful, pleasant, musical old river, with fruits and bonbons, and kisses, and flowers—curls dancing in the breeze, bared arms, lolling and lounging and leaning, and then—*overboard;* swift drinking up of the warm little morsel, as though the river thirsted for the sacrifice, and the closing again of the limpid sheet—a white face looking up farewell and fearless, while the wall grew thicker between it and the sky; and she is here to-night, lovely as of yore by the light of yon old stars, before the massed gloom of the trail of barges falling with infinite tenderness. Yes, place these together; they are one now. Fall back, ye artists, these are no models for your craft; go to the lusty and the strong, filled with song as the birds are, and laughter as these were! The children of light and of color are yours; this grim nursery hath none of them.

What are they bending over, down by the old pile, their circle of lanterns lighting up the scene?

The grapnel of the pioneers is raising wickerwork of modern build—a basket borne by the stream from meadows where cottage gardens slope to its brink. Some child, perchance, essayed a vessel, and found the thing float forth, as treasures do. It is entangled by the brick and cord or other weight upon some feline pet drowned at night, a soft furred joy of grouped tearful ones around the fire that seems colder and duller; its coat of many colors gleamed on the hearth-rug, the most lovable bit of furniture in the place, until one night the man came home in anger, and did this deed for a small theft such things often make, and scared little faces saw it torn from their protecting grasp and thrown to the cold, cruel river, by which they watched all night with the dumb pain of young bereft of the darling. Place it on the flags, not loathingly; once it was a link.

A commotion there—by the green moist boarding and brick, where sewerage of the warehouses trickles its noisome course in search of the parted waters. They are raising the gaunt, brass-burdened Roman, a mud-encumbered shield on his arm, spear blows still upon the mail and plates, warrior majesty stern on the face, and a glory of gold below the scarlet Eagle; hand to hand he may have fought the great Caractacus; the spiked club of the Briton have ruddied the river for an hour.

And gently now, 'tis a slender form, surely the sweetest ever flown from the Bridge of Sighs to the shoreless; an old note-book still in the pocket, with leather all peeled and parted, but a letter fresh and sad as can be, with the force of an old reminder: from a father somewhere away who has smoked his pipe in the ingle-nook with lowered head a long time past, with wistful longing in the honest eyes for other ties than these that snap all down the years. And her hand clutches hard at the pocket as clinging to the last to *something from there!* "Fashioned so slenderly!" They used to shelter that frail bosom from cold and damp, and girt it close with flannel; now look! No wonder the winds howl down the courts and alleys, and rattle the hoists and chains to gibbet symphonies. Mark the horrid swarm of rats that feed on such as these. O dainty meat for unclean vermin of the Thames! Mark the archway reptiles crawling from dank and fetid crannies, the shapeless horrors of this ghastly channel, staring with bleared eyes at the lanterns and blinking with wonder. They have had it their own way so long, this upset utterly perplexes them. A pretty thing this stirring up of the river! Better, you think, the luxurious boudoir, with its perfume and elegance, than this raking up of the fare of a menagerie of terrors!

They have fished up an old iron caldron, of classical type well known below the greenwood. Whence comes this? Thrown hither by roving troop of nomads driven to these narrow ways by city banks, or has the barge-man's dame cast this as worthless from her cabin's little space?

Raise them with care, good Sir! Knit pain, twin sorrows, linked drama of despair; two—boy and girl, arms wound, dead heart to heart, ice lip to lip, blended threading of soaked hair, twined fingers, palm to palm; pathos this, if ever! Are they brother and sister, perished amid the desolateness of the grim great city that had no hand, of all the millions, for them? Are they boy and girl lover, who walked to this adieu of grief, seeking rest together with a kiss and a clutch, while the water closed and the gas-lamps paled, and a new strange music filled their ears? Nay, part them not; life closed for them with strong stern song; we are ignorant of its history, but this tragedy in sculpture is sufficient.

Cast not that old brown hat aside with such contempt; it is more glossy than for many a long day before it took, beaver-like, to the water, and yet it has evidently weathered many storms. It is battered, crownless, and wanting of rim; it is greasy and worn, with the band in shreds; yet nobody knows the brains it was wont to cover, the kind head ever thinking for others, the aching toiler that kept together the home, and faced the wolf till it slunk adown the street, to some other house where the women and children were left, and no hat was hanging in the hall.

They have a strange burden there, clad with costly exercise of taste of a by-gone fashion, starlike diamonds still upon the breast, and quiet courtliness Whitehall could not surpass. Some victim of a monarch's jealousy, no doubt, floated hither from the Tower.

Leaning on the hard, observant bridge that sees so much and tells so little, we mark a crowd of phantom faces and dim-drawn forms that start from out the depths. Charybdis! Scylla! declare thy tenantry! Single out the shadows of this clustered train. Come forth, ye woe-begone of men and women, whose lives were a triumph of creation, who now people the solemn halls all mud-bestrewn and refuse-charged! One has said we can but stand and look upon the Sister Fates of the Parthenon with awe and in despair. It is thus we gaze upon the retinue of shades invoked of Thames: seamstress, shattered framework of woman, whose every hope died out, stitched down to death, while sickness crept apace with time and wan despair; broken-hearted wife, abandoned for the stranger whose hearth held more attraction; sailor, the faithful grasp failing at last, and the void of a brown kind face upon the rigging; delicate one, with the babe still nestling at the breast as on that fatal night; sweet-featured girl of the bruised trust; priest of the glittering ritual that turned thy shallow senses; empress of players' courts, that in thy day hadst many thrones, but never a one like the horrid place we have thee from; gray-headed speculator, of lost fortunes, that didst play dominos with widows' hopes and orphans' lives; banker, whom men said harsh things of, while every newspaper was stabbing at thy reputation, head of a once colossal firm, strong as some pillar upon 'Change; ballet girl, clad in miserable print, that didst know the bitterness of the rising of a younger and a fairer favorite; clerk, whose sorry weakness, despite thy fond mother's prayers, brought this about; father and tiny girl, that walked foot-sore, a-hungered, and altogether weary, so many miles, to rest in this chill bed, with its curtains of November fogs, its quilt of noisome scum; apprentice, indentured to a trade too rough and gross for thy winged strength, that wouldst rather die with thy dreams than see them ground away; O grave and splendid boy, that hast clasped hands with Chatterton and borne thine ideals from this brown-green grave! large-hearted, dusk-skinned beauty from the hot clime of the cactus flower, how came this death to thee in the city of the Christians? child, that wast known at corners with the orange basket, whom busy men spared an instant to peer at, for thy fresh young face, how now? that little head has been pillowed on many a door-step, and at end of it all to come to this grim terrace of the water-rat; old woman, venerable, beautiful in thy frosted years, hadst no brave boy to save thee from the work-house, that this was chosen? tradesman, whose reputation being flown, the credit scoured the horizon like hawk in quest. Thus they pass on in rapid procession, the tenants of the chambers paven with bones that were lissom with grace; that corridor the waters sweep through, until it resembles the ivory waste where carrion swoop to find all bare. They pass on, are lost in the gray haze—perchance to whirl their ghastly waltz around the dome of cold St. Paul's.

Bring that hither! Take brush, clear water, and napkin, if you have one. A casket, silver surely, and richly chased, with massive banding; a lock, unlike our day, graven with odd signs—hearts, lions, arrows, and other allegory; it is much scratched and indented by rude cornering of bricks and tiles; it has been in uncongenial company, one can see; nails of broken tubs have irritated this fine fresco, handleless chisels have tried to pick a quarrel, tires of old wheels have encircled it till its argent paleness blushed plebeian, broad flails of loosened barrels have smote it in the face, horrible things have made their form upon its decorated plate, blue faces have stared at it vacantly floating on, dead dogs have rested upon it, and rats have sought to peer within; bottles have knocked it convivially and insulted the stateliness they were powerless to imitate; the sweep of boats has not disturbed it, and all the sluices have failed to wash it forward. It is casket still; and, if we mistake not, *that* the accomplished Surrey sent to the fair Geraldine by water, and lost about this part, or said to be; verses and gems the cargo. Our smiths will open it; we want some polished turnings of the Muse just now.

If we could part the Red Sea again, dig deep where the host was strewn, remove the layers of drifted sand, or restore the trappings and the treasures of buried Egypt, we should not, even there, recover so many or so curious relics as on this night from the Thames—the river ancient as Pison, which compassed the land of gold; as Gihon, the palm-shadowed serpent of Ethiopia; as Hiddekel, the ibis-haunted stream of Assyria; as Euphrates, the dusky splendor of borne lilies. Yet so strange the vast dépôt we have unwatered, so manifold the sections of this basement, more stored than all the line of blocks upon the wharves, how contrary the old brown thing they handle with such comical contempt—an earthen vessel of rude potter's clay, yet hereout may have quaffed that lustrous Boadicea whom Suetonius Paulinus vanquished when the London of her day was laid in ashes. 'Tis a great, unwieldy, long-necked, thick-lipped, large-mouthed vessel, stolid and coarse and heavy, yet hereout may have poured the wheaten wine which refreshed the gracious Queen of the Iceni. And not as of any consequence, but as one more instance of the incongruity of friendships and the kinship of one common clay, a marmalade jar from far Dundee has wedged itself impertinently within curve of the handle. Dissever that before removal to the cheery block surnamed Museum, where the ages count by platter, and each old pot spells an epoch.

They are lifting the slight lithe form of a lad, on whom many hopes once centred; the head-gear is divided by colored quarterings, the apparel is close to the symmetry. The youth rode horses, by weight, for money; a superb sample of excess of training. Once the coquette Fortune played him false — it was a sorry turn; he disappeared; bought over, some thought; turned tail, others; crossed the Channel, a few; while a quartette whispered of foul play; and all were wrong. It was the night he came from Epsom, disgraced. An overcoat disguised the badge of his calling of which he had been so proud: walking the bridge with the listless, uncertain gait of a blank despair, feeling even the light from the lamps a pain, and the hasty glance of the passers-by a shame; disconsolate and more miserable every minute, and the result of all the superb excess of training coming out in the horror of a desperate deed, in the fleeing to the shifting, swaying, flickering sheet, that even as he looked upon took form and color of the springy turf.

What is it now? A ploughshare! Rusty, yellowed, battered, blunted; where on earth did this run its course; whose broad lands cleave to the furrows? We see the pleasant reach leaning to the water-courses, the homestead crowning the hill, the line of oaks bounding the pastures, the fair ridges of fallow land all bared for next season's splendor. And how comes the implement of husbandry wedged in this soft soil, this marl and clay and alluvium shrouding the secrets of this mighty channel?

The men are busy with their torches and lanterns; dark places are made light; washed-away boarding and masonry are brought into odd relief; hollows and grim archways, outlets and chasms in the stone, shadowy alcoves between the piles, loosened bricks with tortuous staples and Titan rivets, slippery buttresses whereon red-eyed lizards crouch to view our inroad on their territory; all the long fortalice of unclean humid ruggedness, all the weird niches with their phosphorescent glamor, bared at last. Our band, like a detachment of spectral workmen, grope for aught the waters have lodged in the hidden chambers, and they start the evil denizens from their retreat; they turn out curious vestiges of river refuse, flotsam and jetsam of daily tides: corks, feathers, bits of wood, decayed vegetables, flowers, paper, muslin, old boots, bottles, straw, hops, children's boats, balls, dolls, old ladies' caps, bonnets, dead fish, a tangle of weed, pocket-handkerchiefs, straw hats, parasols, walking sticks, fishing rods, oil tubs, shreds of hop pockets, a tattered Testament, biscuit tins, a distiller's circular sticking to a *Guide to Knowledge*, bundles of mystery, egg-shells, orange peel, masks, a clothes prop, a glove, a cricket bat, scent bottles, pantaloons, an oar with the clutch of a skeleton hand still firm, a bib and tucker, a camera, a coop, the prospectus of a public company, a printed sermon, vases, a sweep's brush, electroplate, various bulbs, a rabbit-skin, a portrait of Mr. Phelps, and an ancient Greek lexicon, jet, majolica, china, tobacco pipes, a caul, and various other things, clammy, horrible to the touch, moist and chilly as hand-greeting of the dead, and, overrunning all, thick growth of excrescent fungosity that makes of the track a heath, a warren, a park, a valley, of prodigal luxuriance to the teeming people of this nether world. And one is curious to know whither the passages and alleys here submerged used to lead, or where they may now conduct. Here are ominous-looking cavities the sharpest boy of our party will not enter; sinuous channels of communication, dank, netted over, and choked, and we speculate upon their termination. Old Fleet is outdone by this great breadth of labyrinth with its secrets and mysteries and mosaic of crevices; these are constructed chambers, many of them commodious enough for crouching of full hosts of fugitives; some open to the water, others are cage-like with fierce bars of two centuries' work; others, with iron sluice-gates, firm to the pressure of the stream as castle doors; others have portcullis contrivances causing a shuddering thrill. A forbidding domain of caverns and kennels of the dead, and low den-like recesses where are a race unlike any order of creation; wonderful grottoes and water-sealed vaults, and halls of the embankment, and spacious aisles of cathedrals of old sewerage and dim subterranean catacombs of city rats; places to which the pleasant jingle of the bells along the Strand never comes, nor music of the boats riding above it all in the sunny summer days. Fishes swim gleefully past, avoiding these; living streams above bridge flow on unthinking of it all, and the mysteries of the Thames lie undisturbed. But this is over; henceforth it will be known, and the crowd will gaze upon the river with new interest.

A herd of Arabs is upon us. From alley to alley, long after closing of the theatres, it has been whispered that something is going on down by the bridge; they arrive in shoals, stand on heads, dive the soft deposit, grimace at the walls of water, vault with the lanterns like will-o'-the-wisps, and chase the gray sachems of the rat tribe all the length of bricken and boarded ledge. Other waifs and strays are here, from wharves and docks and stairs and piers; amphibious ones, to whom the river is a parent, and who resent this drying process with threats and curses. They think we would transport the bed away to some region of which they have heard only by tradition; some country where the hay grows that passes on the barges, the garden produce that goes rumbling past to the borough market, where a cabbage plot is their realism of earthly joy, and the poultry-yard, where guinea-pigs lave their mottled sides in an old brown and yellow baking dish, is the only future desired, when all the mud-larks and scum-scraping are at an end.

Even as we watch these destitute ones, a stirring operation proceeds farther on. Hereabouts the collision happened eleven years since—a pleasure-steamer and a barge heavily freighted with grain; the stolid old hulk was comparatively uninjured, the lighter vessel went down, and many were plunged into mourning; the consternation is still fresh upon the memory. It is left free to explore now. Mud is thick on velvet of the cabin, on maple, and glass, and gilt; it is a scene of very wreckage, with the best of it broken and shivered to pieces, and the strongest twisted and rent. Decorations are chipped and rotted, electro of the saloon corroded, curtains and carpets nibbled and torn, chandeliers overnetted by weeds, and the whole dismantled deck a strange scene of ruin in a state of preservation. A man stands by the steward's locker, his apron green as the rest, his beard like Neptune's châtelaine, incrusted with innumerable shells. It is all a waste; the drip, drip of water, the toil and creak of wood too rotted to bear the strain of iron and rope, the splash as our men move over the eddies and gullies, the melancholy soughing of the wind —this is all the utterance. And they who went down, who changed color in the homes to sombre deadness; the fresh-faced youth with his girl—they could not afford a trip to the sea, but having a day for pleasure, chose the rippling sunny Thames—the old man and his dame from the country town away there, Midland, who had not been on the river since the wedding day when it was just such another, all smiles and invitation; the overworked fore-woman from the outfitting warehouse, with but one holiday she could call her own, and that must be spent upon the river, it was so sparkling and welcoming; the butcher, sprucely attired with the best tie of crimson, vest of blue, coat of purple, trousers of check, horseshoe pin, and guard woven by maid of the tavern; the neat young person who taught the piano in small streets—that knowledge of notes was her sole wealth, and it brought in little enough, yet out of it she contrived to save for this journey down the Thames, with its gleesome, healthful change; the school-boys with their sisters, Londoners all, and accustomed to going in company, with laughter and love in their beautiful eyes, and thrilling with joy in the bloom of their youth. Hold the torch aloft! It might be a group of Buonarotti's or Cellini's, hand in hand, sculpt limb to limb. Phidias, Praxiteles, Lysippus, Pheidon, Chares, your subtle skill never posed, or chased, or carved, or chiselled white magnificence that equalled this—a mere dead group of English children, flushed to the last with hope, clinging hard to one another, while the curious, chill wave arose and benumbed the limbs, but not the lips that gave the good-by kiss.

Yet further on are men bringing to the light of modern times an old sedan, entangled upon it a tiny glove, dropped maybe from over the bridge. What little shell-pink hand was cased in this white silk, what powdered, patched old countess rode in this quaint vehicle to the stately minuet in the nave of old St. Paul's?

The grappling hook has fastened upon the wire of a cage; a feather or two of rich-hued yellow all that remains of the sometime songster. But we see this picture linked with the rusted bars and bent and broken home: a pleasant villa, like a nest itself; a young wife left much alone, and we hear her whisper her sorrows to the pet—the only living thing that loves her, it seems, in the loneliness. The story has ended here for one of them; and the other? We see a delicate, poor lady upon her knees, leaning the throbbing brow upon the icy stone of the bridge, in her hand a cage covered round with paper; *this* is dropped, the horrid splash ringing in her ears through every street as she hurries to her broken home. They might take all else, but she could not bear that to fall into the stranger's hands. A situation on the morrow—for sake of the darling that prattled all night for the lost playmate, a music of anguish to the stricken woman entering upon the battle.

What is the burden lifted now with reverent care? Why do these artists gaze with so sad an interest upon this face with its calm majesty? This was one of them. Let memory travel back and recall how one of daring genius was missed from his old studio at Brompton; how friends searched all his favorite haunts, even to the region of his grand novitiate in Italy; how the beautiful unknown of the passionate face and faultless form that had figured in so many of his pictures was sought also and unavailingly, and how men said the painter had gone mad over the ideal of some earlier story. How the house with the garden, the deep blue curtains, and the exquisite untidiness out-doors and in, were kept, even as he had left it, by the mother who had fallen upon that mournful pain of taking possession, and who never lost faith in his return. Upon the wall fronting his work a dusky face, and on the easel the last study—a curious piece of vivid imagery representing a long stretch of murky water, with a glimmer here and there from lamps upon the bank, and a train of spectral ones crouching by the brink, and, low down in the toils of river-weed and wreckage drifted from northern seas, himself; but that grim picture's significant realism failed to touch her faith. It was left with all else, with the brilliant confusion of the artist's home; the volumes scarcely of the order approved by the gentle Christian mother; with the old Stradivarius she knew the tone of as well as the echo of her proud boy's voice; the hookah, odorous yet, the Turkish compound but part consumed; the embossed programmes of theatres and a dead bouquet; colors fresh on the palette, and the silver and pearl knife stained with an opal pigment; the brigand hat, the cloak thrown carelessly upon the velvet couch, all left as he had loved them in the chamber where he had spent all his soul, grown weird, traced mystic picturing, and vanished, even like the gloomy souls of fable. Replace the coat about the shattered, battered breast, the cap above the brain that will think and suffer no more; all the proof of skill has ended; the hand will no longer spell sweet things with color; the eye that saw beauty so quickly is glazed to the fairer language; conception that wrought in tints and hues the loveliest of dreams shall weave no longer in the earthly studio.

They are shovelling lumps of some black deposit into baskets; coal or bog-oak of the forest that once stood here. One old savant in spectacles stoops over a vein of metal. They are not down here every night, and they agree with David in this at least, that there may be wonders in the deep.

Tin is here in abundance, the ancient tin that gave the island some reputation, and also tin of the moderns—all the old Dutch ovens and dust-pans of London, it would seem.

And now a quaint brass shield is brought to light; figures thereon tell of days when gentlemen allied with one or other of the Roses. Something is caught on the arm-rest, dripping like a shaggy dog, and reminds one of your little girl or ours, for it is a tiny jacket of astrakhan lined with silk, and sewn with lace, and of the best quality; fallen, let us hope, from the bridge or over the side of some boat.

And here they have a tambourine, relic of some roving troupe of acrobats, and the heir-loom of picturesque vagrants—Bohemians, Zingari, Gitanos, Zigeuner, or whoever lost it; calling to memory the pleasant march, with the sultry sun full blaze upon the glossy tresses, the women tramping it as though possessed of the land, stately with tenderness as was Hagar; the young tripping before them garlanded with dog-roses, men chanting travel-legends of the tribes; brave, thoughtless, as back in those days when the *Volonté de Dieu* and the Red Cross ruled the land.

A green baize bag filled with school books, the cord entangled upon the hook of one of the drags. This tells a tale that does not need the pencil sketch in the atlas—the big brick building, with its desolate rooms and dormitories more cheerless than the barracks; the red brick boundary of a garden the boys but seldom catch a glimpse of, and then only to see continuation of geometry. We can fancy something of the story, the coming of the gentle, tender-hearted boy, whose sensitiveness shames the vulgar coarseness of his new companions; the unspoken grief like a crown upon the youthful delicacy, yet with it all a manly bearing before the sneer and jest; the punishment for a fault committed by another, brutal torture from the hand of the fellow having care of these, with iron discipline and but little love, adopting a system of treatment which resembles the crushing of wax flowers with a sledge-hammer; then laying up of the child, and whispering along the grim corridor, and Vulcan-like ministering of the housekeeper; followed by the unavoidable sending for his friends, and the suavity of the brute; the kneeling of the father by the death-bed of his slain darling, from whom never a reproach had fallen; the taking away of his books with intention to treasure them, but memory of all causing them to take form of weapons of a barren deadliness, and—these were hurled to their fitting end.

The moon emerges from a cloud and silvers the gray stone and the great buildings stretching either side of the river; the distant masts and the net of rigging come clear to the view; more spires stand in relief than will be seen from any other site in the world; the throb of the city heard from afar tells of the town that never sleeps. From below the arches sounds a ringing of pick and axe as though the Titans were attacking the stronghold of Saturn. It is a study of contrasts.

They have come upon a halberd, stained and blunted, and from contour of the blade it bespeaks the period of the Huguenots; a merciless-looking axe of Genevese formation, a relic that has done sorry work in the crimson days. Tush! Take it yonder, and present it to the warder of the Tower—it may join its kindred.

By the smiles of satisfaction and the glistening in the moonbeams while weighed upon the fingers, we judge that gems have been discovered; some strings of lustrous stones thrown hither by a wretched, close-pressed thief. Watches, and chains, and bracelets, and innumerable pendants, with a hundred gorgeous decorations. Place these aside, subject to the pleasure of her Majesty, who, of course, will hear of these strange explorations. People are getting about. Humphrey's Warehouses and Fenning's Wharf—the block standing where the fire raged—and docks along the Tooley line, Barclay's area, the Billingsgate stages, the piers and stairs, the Custom-house pavement, and the Old Swan frontage, are dotted with spectators, who wonder what the corporation are up to now. Opinions are divided upon the why and wherefore of this odd commotion, some thinking the enemy are sailing up the Thames, and others that science or the *Telegraph* and *Herald* are looking for the source. One party will have it the sluices are disorderly, another connects it with the widening of London Bridge, and others, again, think it a malicious scheme to fire the river.

A sheen of light is on the dripping vegetation of the banks, upon piles and planks and girders, and the lanterns gleam on the sides, colored like savannas under fretting of the fire-flies, until they resemble a pageantry of some new mythology. But they are raising a form with infinite care, disclosing a face with its lifeless sculpture, so calm a wonder of cold beauty, that insensibly we are won, and say, *this* would have been our friend; and we bare the head before the repose and serene tranquillity, quietly passionate as the silent poetry on some Roman cameo; one of those faces which speak an out-living music and a far-seeing hope, and that dwells upon the memory forever.

It is a curious record of findings. They have an old tea-chest on the barrow, a memento of King William Street, no doubt, and weird are the fine arts from the celestial point of view. What cunning hand of Pekin, Nankin, Canton, Hang-Chow, or Tien-Tsin drew the loveliness hereon, or did it start from Hoxton, where 'tis said the tea-chests are abundant in creation? A menagerie of dragons and red-winged vicious plaintiffs in some suit with goblin mandarins, the barbarous show before a pig-tailed court of arabesques, grotesques, and moresques.

Something now of greater interest; a slip of once gorgeous tapestry, the reflex of work, a treasure of the Tuileries. Dainty fingers of the Duchesse de Berri may have wrought this silken idyl, whereon David seems to play before the King of Sicily, while young Italy or Israel (they are all dark alike, and the fishes have nibbled at the noses), standing in the terraced background all among the scarlet oleanders, is entranced by the music, the song, or the harpist's golden hair. The colors have stood exposure well. Take it to Sydenham, South Kensington, where you will.

What genius of buffoonery did these striped pairs of pantaloons belong to? What order of troubadours of the expressive minstrelsy, with excess of *allegretto scherzando?*

Heads are bent over a porte-monnaie. It bears a titled name. The gold of the clasp is haughtily crested. Those of us who recall the tragic history of the fall of its youthful owner handle it with a species of awe, and we who knew and loved him in University days, when the glory of chestnut curls was fairer than aught on earth, and the frank face had no compeer, we beg for it. It will be to us as his voice, heard again after the long sad silence. The Antoinette-like, splendid mother, who has dropped his name as an acquaintance, who long since forfeited the right of recollection, and who yet, we think, weeps scalding tears in privacy, may care to see this. She is more severely august than ever in public, scathing commiseration before it dares to intrude itself.

A small case comes next, and upon opening it we are surprised to see a chalice, a flagon, a shell, and stole and cassock. This may be sacrilege; or is some mystery of a changed life laid bare?

Here is an old canister that has stored gingerbread for a generation, and at all the fairs and races. We can see the white cloth and its decked retinue; and what an ironical little gilt court it is upon the stand, and how warmly it caricatures society. The glitter peels, and the greatness crumbles; the cold, methodical, sweet-toothed dealer in sarcasm seated on the tub, caring little for the world or its institutions, so the weather hold and the palate long for treacle, has had much experience in the gingerbread way, and has seen many ups and downs and roundabouts. She lives with the girl loosening those brandy-balls, in the hooped cart yonder; they know a deal of geography between them—more than we who have learned of maps and charts. They manage the business, and so well, the girl may one day be set up in a shop with a front to it—they talk of that sometimes while the child is cleaning down the bony steed. They have no friends, and want none; see the same sunburned faces up hill and down dale all summer-time; the same housewives, when in winter they change to the cart with brooms and rugs and eccentric wicker-work; but a nod and a thank ye for service are all the interchange. They are liked, though. Strong but silent sympathy exists among the rovers. Many a cake is tossed to waif and stray on the caravan trail, and the cup of water is never refused. They are upon good terms with the merchants on travel, and exchange courtesies with the doll and rattle store next door, in case of paper running short. The slim, dusky child knows the trappings will some day come to her—the little close house on wheels, with pot and pan and tub, the coarse brown sugar and flour, with such else as may be in the locker when the old lady is called away above the gingerbread, and she preserves a dignity at once graceful and becoming, which is often necessary up there on the heath. We, with our exquisite essences and elegant niceties, think it a jest when told the girl is kept in tether closer than if she were at some fashionable boarding-school—an excellent jest, no doubt. This old tin canister might improve upon it.

A quaint unwieldy horse-pistol has turned up, looking strangely massive beside the machine-wrought revolvers of Colonel Colt. Many a fray upon the highway has this made crimson, and it would be interesting to know by whose notorious hand. Did it figure or disfigure in the Rye

House Plot, in the affair of Captain Porteous, or did it once belong to Smuggler Wilson, who, executed at Tyburn, came to life under the agreeable operation of dissection? Eugene Aram may have pocketed it with books and manuscript, or Earl Ferrers have herewith closed account with his just steward. Lord Gordon perhaps used it in the riot days, or Hatfield fired at George III. Was it Parker's, the mutineer of the Nore, or did Bellingham with this assassinate the Prime Minister? Did Barnett wound Miss Kelly of Covent Garden Theatre by its means, or was it the pet plaything of Corder, Burke, or Greenacre? In the hands of Daniel Good or Bloomfield Rush this may have gained no enviable distinction; or Manning may have contrived to scare more old dames than ever did his Highness George, Prince Regent. The unsightly weapon is venerable enough to have served the entire calendar. As the men transport it to Newgate, they handle it with the awe entertained by the public for the classical.

Softly now. Replace the drabbled finery and smooth the dishevelled hair. We had a little sister, and these twain were of a sex. Be gentle with the tricky ornament—our little sister loved her beads, blue bows, and simple lace. How cold are the poor little feet, and the spun silk stockings all dirt and grime! our sister had her worked and warmed and perfumed slippers. This hat was a tasteful contrivance once, but the ostrich plume has long ceased to wear the beauty of a feather. Our little sister lamented if she was but caught in one shower of rain; and now fancy this washing up and down the dire canal that floateth to eternity, the strong buffeting of brutal eddies and fierce uniting of vagrant spars. Conceive the long waste course where no harbor and no haven is, the chill desolateness of steering forever and forever, and still no progress; the terrific storms of winter beating upon the defenseless face, snows sinking to the bosom that sheltered roses, white hands outstretched for saving, for sympathy, but swept back by the hurried ploughing of boats freighted with girls. O grim saturnalia of life! Realize the exposed beauty of limbs sliding by the clammy piers of the bridges, seeking to coil along the icy ledges of the bank. These are the fair proportions that curled and nestled upon down; and our little sister had sleepless nights even thus, thinking of such as compose the poetics and heroics of our little sisters. One can read this life through all its chapters; all the whirl and the waltz with sin, all the sickness of pleasure that vanished as a dream. A fair doll's face and the deep, old-fashioned flax of the hair, drooping eyes, liquid and coy, and glittering like the lizard's in the dead of night when staid folks sleep, and the wonderful youth that never aged with all the waltzing; we see her every where, ever with fresh companions, always in silk attire: upon Brighton Pier, at Scarborough September races, on Durdham downs, on the Tunbridge pantiles, at Cowes regatta, at October meets by Leamington, and on Cheltenham's promenade; at Devon's Porto Ferrajo, and upon the Duke's Drive, Buxton; on the Lees, Folkestone, at a Milsom Street morning in Bath, an archery party at Aberystwith, the races on L'Ancresse Common, Guernsey; or the assembly-rooms, Ilfracombe. During an evening stroll on Southsea sward to military music; amid languor of the piney Bournemouth air; boating round Beachy Head with starlight upon Eastbourne; in the luxurious drives about St. Leonard's; routs, ballrooms, drives, promenades, or the sumptuous apartments of great hotels found in Bradshaw's appendix, and—*this*. Lay the head giddy so oft with care, cross the hands that trifled with playthings from cradledom with reverence, reject the opportunity for sneering comment, and murmur "peace" above the poor remains. Butterfly wings of dead turquois used to rest resplendent upon these matted tresses where river-weed is now the coiffure, and the tiny pockets where minnows are caught were the receptacles for gold without number and without limit, and yet—*this*.

All the time of our reverie the workmen have been hoisting bales and packages; not, as we think, from the merchantman sunk here, but part of the devastation of the terrible tide and gale of January, 1767, when the storage of cellars and basements, of vaults and warehouses, was all washed away. Tides of that day defied all the reasoning of the Keplers and Newtons.

They raise an old man of sharp and unpleasing countenance; they are abrupt in their movements as though not impressed by their charge. He is gray as a badger, with a fist doubled as in his last gasp he would have smote the river in its face. All his days he lived in dread—the dread of getting wet. Important engagements were negatived if it happened to rain; at hotels he would strip off the sheets and sleep between blankets; he always superintended airing of his linen, and was unmarried lest the wife should be insufficiently particular. When the accident happened, the first and only time he ever trusted himself upon the water, it was looked upon as a retribution. His leap from a gangway fell short of the length, and by the adjustment of natural order governing our prejudices he came to tussle with the element he had dreaded all his life through.

Oh, it was a weird phantasy, this conjuring up of the dead down by London Bridge, this recalling of the shades whom the waters had blotted out from the scroll of life! And often the Minister shuddered while the pageant passed, his mind echoing the poet's line,

"And can the sea give up its dead?"

it was this and not the chill contact with the gray old bridge that caused him quivering of the lip.

His vigil was well-nigh over, yet not until the dawn would the meed of fascination be fulfilled. He had often walked at these hours, by dense streams meandering through meadows where all the trees were hung with sable and all the land was dusk; the utter solitude, the solemn contrast with the scenes of daylight, magnificent with color, tuneful with life's orchestra, possessed strange charm for him; and in sleeping cities, where the current rippled sluggishly through low arches, and laved black walls of warehouses; and by silent mills, where ghostly soundings, the drip, drip of clinging weed, or the creaking of slack timber, burdened the hush, and set the depth quivering; and by shadowy locks, that stemmed hard floods, and left narrow bridging ledges whereon to stand and trace some star, enmeshed in abysmal eddies. It all had curious charm for him.

But see, they lift with reverence a fragile form—some poor man's daughter. Playing upon the stone steps the girl fell in. A score of jackets were doffed in a trice, all the stubborn bravery of untutored Saxons stirred by one impulse; but it was the father took the mighty leap, beast-like, blind, conscious only of the peril of his darling, sublime, daring, maddened, panting in fierce extremity; his stricken gaze on the little face low in the morning sunlight, more beautiful than ever. And both were lost.

Long corridor of lifeless beauty is this bottom of the world's chief river. Fair limbs sway with the ebb and flow, faces upturn as watching those who often lean over and look down, with so much of thought, so much of sadness, and thus the living and the dead confront through all the ages, while the former ever join the ranks of the vast company of the silent.

We have aroused a great commotion here, but the long light line eastward dispels much of the horror. Already the shadowy span of the arches is taking color and form—those delights of the artist's eye; the spectral creations of our quest vanish, softly and silently as they appeared; one by one our helpers and associates leave the place for distant homes; majestically the waters roll to mingle in their first embrace below the dawn; the forest of shipping begins to tint, drab, brown, black, gray; here and there a scarlet cap of some boatman in relief from the blanched sails and trellis of rigging. There is noise above the bridge; busy London is alert, and the country vehicles are rolling in; early workmen, and those who have been out all night, students of the city's most interesting phase, the first of the hours of the morning; these are straggling past, and they gaze upon the man still leaning by the stone recess with a measure of pity. White upon the sky is changing to pink, and the moist ledge strings tiny chains of rubies; a great spider has woven her web between the stone-work, and she sits glowering upon her work in a rugged but dry corner, unable to comprehend the gathering of pendants of the river mist upon such slender work as hers. Fires are glimmering from one and another of the barges, smoke curls about the narrow shafts, men blue-jerkined, sturdy, sullen, with short pipes, appear on the coal-blackened decks; fish-freighted luggers toil in a body for the Billingsgate wharf; cabs roll past hastening to the railway, luggage built high above, half-sleepy families within; these look wonderingly and with sympathy upon him. Little ones wave hands with charming smiles, the delicate tints of the advancing sunlight flushing their flower-like faces—and what contrast to his grave and gray studies of the solemn hours! All the panorama of the river-side assumes clearness of picture. The Tower rises in relief from the cradle of color. London and St. Katherine's Docks, the Customs, St. Olave's Church, the wharves, the Southeastern Terminus, and Rotherhithe Church, come forth on the clear perspective, the eye finally resting upon the imperial cupola of St. Paul's. Upon the bridge the people thicken; young men and maidens going to their work, or bound for the railways. It is the stream of life and of youth, and the Minister turns from the ancient study to the fresh contemplation of the dawn upon this, the symbol of time. Where childhood is, with the charm of its wooing, science and learning and deadness of days fade away, with the ebb and the flow and the echo of dirge. Pæan of awakened life has chimed in the DAWN; he gives all his heart to beauty as it *lives*, beyond the Night, above the Thames, and in the Dawn.

Thoughtfully the Minister walked away from one of those strange night musings it was his fancy now and then to entertain. Homeward, where his household, but just stirring, looked without wonderment, ay, and with loving respect, upon that tired wanderer. Such early entrance was familiar to them; they knew that many a time and oft he passed the night beside the sick or troubled. He was so gentle with his servants, so courteous and tolerant, treating them with so supreme a measure of kind yet firm control, advantage was never taken in either of his houses—and there were three establishments to supervise. In his absence as in his presence duty was paramount—an almost unique experience, and one but too rare. Of a truth the members of his households experienced as devoted a regard, as legitimate an esteem, as did those people to whom he ministered, the majority of whom blessed his very name. And yet there were those abroad actually canvassing the man's morality, propriety, decorum, discreetness, virtue, and the rest; as though this monarch, crowned and diademed, should wear a white card with Moral—Proper—Decorous—Discreet—and Virtuous thereon, for every fool to stare at.

As it happened, he did not controvert any one of these inestimable qualities, and did live to the letter of their ethics, and considerably beyond the letter; but he was the last man on earth to blazon this forth, and he would never stand up in a self-constituted court of gossips and declare he was this, or plead he was the other; although feeling the faintest breath of aspersion upon his honor as only one of so fine a calibre does feel; and he would rather face the ruffianly foot-pad's blow upon the temples than the back-handed stab of the scandalist.

However, he did not permit this to influence any work in which he might be engaged; he did the work, and thought about it afterward; and if there happened to be an outline here or there that the vulgar might fill in with scarlet if so minded, well, he just left them to fill it in, and only thought with that sad tenderness of his how that they might, perhaps, have been better engaged.

If Westley Garland had more regard for one Scriptural text than another, it was for "Touch not the unclean thing;" and immeasurably the most unclean thing in the world to him was scandal; so he left it to take care of itself, or to be cared for by those professing an interest therein.

Mr. Garland's housekeeper in town was a kindly woman, of dignified bearing, amicable and composed, with a placid smile about the mouth, and a soft clear light within the eyes. She was looking peacefully for the beyond whither had gone her darlings, husband and son, a boy mown down in the splendor of his flower-time. It had been a sore period with her, nigh to the portals of a bitterness more terrible even than despair, when she heard this man preach; and what a message! Thrilled, shaken, broken again, but by other weapons; moved, subdued utterly, and prostrate. This was the time of weakness, but it was better than that benumbed bitterness beyond despair.

And again she went to hear him, bore up through passage of a mighty crowd, struggling as for dear life with those as eager to hear further of the message, and she heard. This time how comforting! It seemed to cover over, close up, heal gently, those wounds and bruises: weak still, but comforted, and comfort is strength. She went again, and it was the balance of the two discourses. Surely the man must know that some such poor one was there present; she could not understand it; but what new life it implanted within her, what glorious hope! She was reanimate; was, if not happy—that came later—at least calm, and calmness is victory; she was at peace. And somehow he heard she was in trouble, as he heard daily of one or another; and she being of too fragile courage to come to him, he went to her, and was moved by sympathy, for she was a gentlewoman, and he thought of one placed much as she. He resolved to find her some home elsewhere, and needing one to undertake it, offered her the management of his house in town. This was the housekeeper; and when Westley Garland led the lonely boy to such kind reception, knowing how it would give joy to both, who can describe the hungry tenderness with which she first viewed his beauty, then gave him her mother-hand, while tears rushed to the eyes. But the Minister had gone ere that; his was the exquisite tact which calculates the moment to withdraw. Now understand this praise of Westley Garland is not with view to exalting him as some Admirable Crichton; he was simply full of imperfection, and he knew it; full of inequalities; not in the least an impossible order of being. Oh, far too human! But all the imperfection and all the inequality were counterbalanced by that charm of disposition, grace of manner, tenderness of feeling, sensitiveness of perception, Christian rule of life, and discretion of conduct we dwell on. Take particular heed to the last, for it is just the point his friends are trying to make elastic, as though, this imperilled, all the rest would not tumble about his ears like a house of cards.

Thus all smiled upon this visit to the house of the Minister, and when Arthur returned to Dr. Nichols's, it was with far happier feelings, and with the thoughts of a new friend and of the kind woman who had so unhesitatingly taken the forlorn one to her heart. He said nothing of it all, but the doctor and Mrs. Nichols noticed it; little, indeed, escaped their notice; and the good doctor asked:

"Have you altered your mind, my boy, about leaving us? Or do you still wish to do so?"

"I still wish to, Sir. I shall feel sorry to leave you for all your kindness, but I am thinking of the future, and may as well be learning something of use hereafter."

"Yes, I think you are right," said the doctor, kindly. "I approve the courage prompting your reply."

And thus began and ended a new era in the life of our boy. First there had been the wild, unfettered, yet beautifully tutored period when the great downs presented instruction as a book, and the stretch of garden was significant of knowledge as a school-room; but, alas! the loving teacher was gone. Then followed a short, dream-like time in the country house, when his mind was busy weaving spells and shedding a halo about a young girl friend. Next the life in town, with its curious episodes and grave routine of work. Then the unknown—that to come, ever blended with the mystical and overshadowed by a roseate hope.

Mark the wild white-rose trees in a garden, how one day they appear spiked all over with star-like buds wrapped in their green incasing—what promise of the coming glory, and what content one may experience, so perfect is the present beauty! But lo! another day or two, and they have opened to delicate small blossoms with maiden fragrance bursting from their hearts, and the palest of blushes struggling up from each as timid of encountering the stranger gaze; and such are more prized, but—the little buds are unforgotten. Another day or two and it is all a crowded mass of broad white bloom; there is a sea of crisp white leaves curling lovingly one toward another; there are whole winds of gentle perfume, slumbering kisses that nestle down between the white flower and the leaf; there is a crush of dazzling blossom and an amazing glow of snowy luxury. It is all wondrously beautiful, and this is more prized than all: but the little buds—so far away though now they seem—are still unforgotten. The day comes when all the bloom lies thick upon the ground, when the beauty is so lavish it is worthless; and until then the youth-time of the flower lives on.

An early life is the bud, an embodied aspiration, the trial of strength upon the wing which shall regulate the after-flight. A first poem is ingenuous; the last responsible. In the first is the concentre of hope, the soul's loving invitation to immortality, the nucleus of faith; in the last it is a battle-piece in the arena of ability, skill, and learning.

Whatever might be before the boy, the past would be valuable, as a past always is, seeing that it builds and shapes and schools and disciplines and prepares for any after-culture; and if no culture, then for that greater life and higher thought than even culture brings.

His heart had been full of beautiful aspiration for long. The Minister just put these into regulation, and commenced the shaping of that which Browning says is alone worth study—a human soul.

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CHAPTER V.

A DREAM IN MARBLE.

It was down in the *London Directory:*

GREVILLE LOVELACE, SCULPTOR.

It was a plain, unassuming-looking house, in a genteel square, West.

He was a shaggy, pale, stalwart man, of restless movement, with a splendid face, and the brow of an idealist and poet.

Artist and poet both, in colorless marble.

Every one knew him by sight, pronounced him eccentric, and stared, as is the custom of the country.

His windows were admired nevertheless. His flowers and ferns, and lace, and bijou elegancies brought from Florence, were of a type of taste altogether unconventional. He had the credit of it all, for they knew there was no Mrs. Lovelace in the background. They thought that rather a pity, as he gave them the idea of a man who required taking care of. Within, he had a superb house, and people were satisfied that he lived the life of the dog in the manger.

Somewhere in the house, it was known, was an atelier, filled with such studies as duchesses raved about and schemed but generally failed to secure, for Greville Lovelace chiselled for love, not wealth, of which he had abundance; nor fame, which he rated at the price of cheap Champagne.

Yes, eccentric, the gossips thought; of an isolated turn of mind; and as the spirit of dwelling apart is one of dead fashion, the tea-table verdict resolved itself "an undoubted genius, but peculiar."

Society saw Mr. Lovelace in the season at two or three leading houses where one meets every body; but he infinitely preferred not going out at all, while people calling to see him troubled him more than a little. Upon certain counts Mr. Lovelace was a lion, and every body made a point of sending him the tiny perfumed compliment, although a refusal was invariably the result. Still, when the mood took him, Mr. Lovelace, sculptor, strolled through the rooms once, with a bow here, a gracious smile there, and the never-absent composure more becoming than a coronet.

He had written a volume of poems—rather good, somebody said; another body said there was nothing in it; the majority of people could not understand it. One coterie searched industriously for its political significance: he hated politics like the pest. An old maiden lady, whose one living hope it was to have her weird curls reproduced in stone, startled her intimate friends by pronouncing the book "a revelation." What with these and the critics—who, although he had never sent out a copy, reviewed the work, and politely declared the writer mad as poor Blake—Mr. Lovelace rather regretted having printed those choice, chaste thoughts. He recalled every copy from the book-shops; went out in an old brown coat, and bought up his own books with indefatigable perseverance; locked them all in a strong cupboard, and thenceforth avoided that track like a snake's nest.

He had spent twenty years upon that book, shaping, moulding, making it sculpturesque, until, when it became so ideal it even pleased *his* exquisite taste, he permitted the launch; and then to hear the chatter at the distance over the five minutes' reading, and the grotesque decision upon his idyls dead and unknown!

This man had been so long softening stone to pathos he was of finer marl himself, heartward—one of the sensitive sort, whom the brusque school would call a fool. He lived a double life—one of fine breeding and true courtesy, as an English gentleman; the other, half music, half poetry; alone with his ideals in the cold and stately world of stone.

More enthusiastic men, with souls like boiling kettles, had rushed off to Rome and Athens, while he was behind and alone in the dull square, the dim, shadow-wreathed studio, the quiet house where only the old housekeeper and the grave servants made cat-like echoes. He did not envy the enthusiasts; he did not care. Cities were a bore to him, the travelling world a menagerie. In his younger days he had travelled, but seen little in any thing save sham; had returned to his lifeless progeny more in love with their white-limbed rhythm, and passionless, exquisite faces, than ever.

People had plotted finely to obtain the *entrée* to his studio, but he was rather nice in this matter, and, without being rude, contrived to decline the honor of these little nose-poking explorations, so they turned to and called him "a Bear." Other epithets also in plenty. Young ladies, sentimentally inclined, named him Phidias, and would have eaten the chips from the rich man's chisel. Elderly ladies called him Pygmalion, and twined their lithe angles caressingly as, thinking of the sweet conceit of their shapeliness in marble, they tumbled into bed. He was Zanoni, Manfred, Aram, and, when not at home to visitors, Lucifer.

His composure under all this—for somehow it all came back to him—was characteristic; sometimes a half-contemptuous smile and low word to the fairest of his creations, that was all; and still keeping to the work, feature by feature and limb by limb, the dazzling studies crowded the little gallery, until it became difficult to pass without hurting the dignity of one or another of them.

In the atelier he was peculiar also. The walls were draped with the richest, blackest velvet; his figures reposed upon the same dense sable; folds of it formed the background to others; the floor was of black glazed tiles; such a veritable black and white world never was seen. The foil to the splendid purity of his family was perfect. He did all this innocently, artistically; with never a descent from the loftiest standard of purity, from snow-drop time to latest roses.

Where we should have been upon the fidget, this insensible old Greek was stony as the rest. Always in the midst of the idealized human, it was no more to him than to an anatomical student in the weird museum at Berlin. One day Greville Lovelace was taken by surprise. A new servant-girl admitted a gaunt matron with a tribe of as gaunt fledgelings—they *should* have been taken to the drawing-room. Two fainted, and the mother accused the man, in his own studio, of impropriety. The same girl *was* doomed to commit error of judgment. Upon another occasion she admitted a bluff young farmer, who mistook our friend for a stone-mason, and wanted a winged dairy-maid for Kensal Green. Another time Mr. Lovelace came upon this domestic genius dusting down the harem with a feather broom, and the delicate hand of a Titan.

Take it altogether, the gentleman sculptor did not love his race, and some members he cordially hated. It could not be helped, but so it was. What religion would one expect of a man who shuts himself up like a toad in a rock?

His tenderness was wonderful nevertheless, and his charity exceeded the tenderness. The poor, the sick, the sorrowing, and those having no friends in all the wide waste of faces, these could testify to that we need not make public, since he desired the death of each good act the moment born.

All one night he had sat with the old mother of the man from whom he bought his stone, bought it dear, for there was a struggle to live in the small house by the marble yard; they of the quarries monopolizing the trade. The man was away in the stone country when Lovelace called, and his mother taken ill since he went, the girl said. The old lady lay a-moaning for her son when the sculptor entered, and taking the hand, as cold but so different to those of his usual handling, he spoke soothingly and with more than the tenderness of sonship. He had once an old mother himself, before his fossil days.

Another time he saw an old man drop at a crossing from hunger, fatigue, or something, quite one of the vulgar ailments, and the civilized crowd were kicking him aside pending removal by the police. With one of his great, serious strides, however, he was by, had the unfortunate man lifted to his carriage, and drove to a quiet, clean lodging, where he kept the old man until he was quite restored.

These acts were talked of, they lived their little day, and died under the great London sky, remembered least of all by him.

People next door thought Mr. Lovelace might have walked occasionally in the back garden. They would have ogled him from behind the dimity, and have stared as they stared on Sundays at the bear. But the anchorite never stirred out there; he knew each of the prim windows with its setting of pompons represented that useful but to him singularly objectionable article—the human eye.

People either side were not in the least curious, but would have just liked to know whether he locked his tea-caddy, where his washing was done, what were the antecedents of his housekeeper, was there a crest on the plate or simply initials, were his manners morose, did he keep a cat, had he ever been engaged, was he addicted to intemperance, and other highly important social items of which calendar is kept on all sides of us. The girls were set to do it over the broomsticks, but making no progress went in-doors, and painted him very black indeed.

And the subject of it all, adamant. Sublime in the dim and dreamy atelier, over a nostril that breathed fire below the snow, a mouth that wreathed like the innermost curve of the water-lily.

And the solicitous—were not interested, but he really ought to marry. He would soon be cured of all that (the traits as retailed).

One day an advertisement appeared in the papers:

TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.—A refined and well-educated youth of unexceptionable respectability can be received in the house of a gentleman sculptor as apprentice. No premium required. Apply personally at 27 Monmouth Road, Islington, between the hours of eleven and one on Tuesday next.

The sculptor at times experienced a great yearning for something the eye could rest upon, when lifted from the wintry beauty of the atelier, something that should be warm and sunny, of equal beauty if that could be, but the beauty of living and loving youth; some other music than the endless majesty of the ring of steel on stone—a voice youthful and sweet, attuned to the devotion of eye. Was this to be found, he wondered. With his fine artist-sense, beauty only of the highest order, and grace to parallel that beauty, dare hope for welcome in the sacred precincts of that chamber. For gentleness he would have had a girl, made boy by garb; but this in London squares is delicate, and he hoped to find one as fair, thrice constant, among the flower-like of his sex.

When Mr. Lovelace arrived at Islington, where he had arranged to meet the applicants, an unexpected reception awaited him. It seemed, indeed, as though the parents and guardians of London had united to offer him ovation. The hospitality of the people of the house had been sorely taxed, and refined youth were stowed away with the dams in every niche but the coal-hole. Spite of which the review was of the plain school, mediocrity was upon the face of it. An ordinary man might have picked from this ordinary lot and returned thanks, but, fastidious to a point, the artist's whole soul rebelled at the outrage, the bare thought offended his æsthetics of beauty. He disliked a narrow brow in boyhood, and differed upon principle from socket-eyes. Warm-colored hair was an aversion, and freckles, pimples, and such small fry significant as a board with "No Trespassing:" as though he would find the lily purity of his own! He affected the courtesy of inspecting the population, and came off the ground with ghastly recollections. One had a cast in the eye, the second a twitch at the trousers, another a horrible boldness of look that would have played the dickens in the studio. If the nose was right, it was red; and if the mouth was red, it was cavernous. Here the hands were coarse and thick, there the ears overlapped upon elephant plan. A charming smile was broken to bits of its sunshine by irregular teeth. Where there was beauty there was no refinement, and gentle manners were accompanied by ornament that would have failed of success at the Masque of Venice. He dismissed the lot, paid the expenses of such as had come long distances—and it was astonishing how many lived in the country—and departed, with the conviction that advertising was humbug. The assembly retreated like out-patients from a hospital.

Now comes the stone-merchant with whom he dealt upon the scene—with diffidence. He knew a gentle lad—the best boy of his Sunday-school—in service as a doctor's page, but who would be glad to change the life; and, above all, for this, his father having been a sculptor, and the boy's thoughts having long turned in the direction of the art. He believed Mr. Lovelace would be very pleased, and he was sure the boy was apt and willing. Should he send to him, that it might be seen if any thing could be done?

The sculptor had narrated his experience and his want, and the kind and grateful man had heard his patron's story without a smile. He felt for him in the majestic loneliness, and revolved a plan or two, but came back to his scholar with the fair young face and gentle manners. He fancied it possible he might suit, having been so liked wherever he had lived.

Mr. Lovelace heard it all, and willingly assented to see the lad. But at home he smiled the quiet smile. He had certainly been interested by the photograph the mason had shown him—liked the face very well; but then, thought he, the smile fading, boys change so, it is very likely after all there will be no resemblance. He took nothing upon hearsay, least of all from the prejudiced for or against; and not to do the child injustice, by forming any sort of expectation—more likely than not to be disappointed—he just forgot all about it; sunk all such modern trifling in the eternal, in the Greek; lost it in the flowing curves of the arabesques; merged it in reverie over his friend Gibson's "Cupid and Psyche," of which the *Art Journal* had said, in 1849, "The divine, ardent boy—the tender, innocent girl, not yet translated to the heaven she bought so dearly"—and shortly afterward turned from his tapping with tiny mallet and chisel, at sound of a little cough, to where there stood blushing at the threshold the original of the picture, cap in hand and hesitating; for the domestic, even yet untamed, had failed to announce the pretty-headed stranger. He stood there like a prince at bay in a fairy story, yet melting to capitulate; the sculptor enjoying the delicious confusion with all his mind on rack how to turn it to account.

Perhaps he had looked up rather indifferently, prepared for another of the young of the Huns, and this had come as a surprise, when his large, piercing eyes went swift from the white to the face like a flower, with the raven velvet for a frame and a foil. Its fresh young beauty and blushes took him all by storm, and his artist-soul gave in at once. He spoke kindly and gently as the boy came forward with that deference so engaging in the young, with quick perception taking to the man whom, albeit he thought him king-like, he was not so very much afraid of after all; and they were friends forthwith.

Then, in spite of his nicety, Greville Lovelace was not so hard to please. Nay, but this boy seemed all that the most exacting of idealists could have yearned for. We can not account for the greater beauty of this than other boys, unless it was that the mother—herself a sculptor's wife and all her days gazing on the Greek—had imbibed so much of its beauty that this sequel was natural. Anyway, there he was, and Lovelace quivered lest he had come to say he would not like a sculptor's life. Thus do we plague ourselves delightfully. He was carelessly brushing aside the chips and flakes, and dallying with the chisel—sole bit of lustre in the grewsome chamber.

"So, Sir, you think you would like to be a sculptor? You will find it dull, dry work. And there are wine and spirit stores your father can apprentice you to, or picture shops with something ever pleasing to the eye, and the gaudy mercers with their silks and velvets and pretty girls tripping in and out. It is well to weigh these things. You will find it very dull and quiet here; and myself—I am no pleasant companion—cross and taciturn. You see, I am candid with you."

He stooped to adjust a fold of velvet, craning his ears to catch the answer, and hearing nothing, looked up stern and frowning. He was *en déshabille*, and very bear-like that morning, with the shaggy hair dishevelled, and the coarse gray working gown untied at the cord; all was out of fashion, and that forbidding frown was very chilling. The boy came up to the form of iron, side by side with the cold blocks, and laid a warm, small hand in his. The sculptor would not let it be seen, but he felt thrilled to the heart while he clasped the soft texture so confidingly intrusted to his keeping.

"I have come to stay, if you will have me," the boy said, simply.

The sculptor led him into another room and placed milk and biscuits before his guest, with a perfect courtliness that might have amused the etiquette-mongers.

It was a tasteful chamber, bizarre and original, with all sorts of gem trifles, and cunning work in ivory and alabaster and bronze; with studies from or by the great Canova, and some of Flaxman's lovely work, and Westmacott's sublime Greek "Euphrosyne." Over the mantel, itself a work of wondrous art, forming a plain spotless pageant of the glory of the Parthenon Metopes, was a portrait in oils of the matchless Dane, Thorwaldsen. Upon a tiny table of malachite one small bust surnamed the "Morning Star," a child in terra cotta—one of Christian Rauch's sweet idyls—and two other children by Mrs. Thorneycroft upon marqueterie of fabulous value. No old paintings, or paintings of any sort for that matter, save the Dane's head above the mantel; no old china, no antique wood-carving or old furniture, no illumination and excess of elaborate ornamental work; no bric-à-brac, or virtu, or exquisite Italian craftsmanship. Mr. Lovelace did not make these a hobby, and dispensed their equivalent among his poor; but all else was so good, so chaste, and, for the most part, so classic, the absence of the stereotyped modern interior was unnoticed. Those bronze "Hours leading the Horses of the Sun" were of infinite beauty, and alone transfixed the eye, so much so that the well-worn carpet passed unnoticed, and the dingy suite of faded splendor (obtained long since to please the eye of a heartless Circe, the sole piece of his marble treasures to which had happened accident) was pardoned or politely looked over, as we can not pardon or politely look over every thing. Upon a slender tapering pedestal was a vase, graceful as a lily cup, wrought by Cellini's delicate hand. Further, some crude but promising work of his own, done in boyhood when a student in the Via della Fontanella, and flushed with inspiration. He loved the work for old time's sake, the clouds were all so rosy and so golden then. Later his heart had been keeping rhythm with this colder land; the outcome of adherence to art, maybe. Perhaps one would have felt relieved by a few Cupids and Nymphs, or even those Nereids and Tritons Rubens has disposed with the shells in his harbor. It is possible the owner himself had come to tire of the changeless repose and beautiful dignity meeting the eye at every turn throughout his house; certainly his eye this day rested with ill-disguised pleasure upon the curl-pated urchin nibbling at the biscuits, not fourteen years at most; and there were studies of fourteen centuries: he had been living so very much back in the periods. He watched the boy's admiring glance with interest, first at a magnificent copy of Ghiberti's bassi-relievi which adorn those gates of the Florentine Baptistery, of which Michael Angelo said they were worthy to be the gates of Paradise; from this to reproductions of Wichmann, the able German; to specimens of rare Etruria, and bronzes of Perugia; to one of Hiram Powers's beauties in statuary porcelain, and a group by Theed; resting finally on Chantrey's "Sleeping Children," at which he stared hard over the milk tumbler.

Then back to the atelier, and under the fair, clear light where his eminence worked, the beauty came out in finer detail; and the sculptor looked about him with a vacant gaze, all the consummate art seemed wanting in something, seemed suddenly imperfect. It was *color*, and *life*, and *soul*.

And while the man explained the nature of the craft and ideals in the stone, the boy walked round with reverent softness, and then asked permission to return to apprise the doctor of his fortune, promising to be back upon the morrow. And the place looked duller, colder, dimmer, when the boy had gone. The sculptor could not banish from his memory the sweet young face; echo of the voice seemed still quivering in and out the round white limbs and square white blocks; he could not work; and oh! impetuous, inconsistent, he must follow him. Not straight, but roundabout, to Doctor Nichols's, where he arrived first, for young sir had been loitering on the way. And the deed was drawn that day, and the blushing boy was made a sculptor.

Mr. Lovelace did not set him sweeping up the chips or polishing his implements, but took him as something dearer—disciple, pupil, friend. Of a truth he began thus late to learn the lesson of all living—that hearts *will* cling, that souls *will* make idols, other than of stone and ivory.

Of course the child loved him—all with whom he came in intimate contact did that—and far too truthful to conceal his gratitude, the motherless boy gave him such wealth of hourly affection, Greville was well-nigh beside himself. It was new and unexpected, and caught him in tender and sensitive chambers, making him captive both heart and soul.

The boy never presumed, never offended; was ever respectful, and invariably delicate.

So the face grew to be a charm in the room, and seemed to warm the stately troupe to sympathy.

At his work the sculptor would look up to where the beauty shone within the vista of his marble; his eye would wander to the black to rest, then back to the beauty again, while a proud, pleased, satisfied smile played to the thought of the prize he had caught. There was much quiet enjoyment derived of the one fact of its being so simply his own. No running about streets for wanton eyes of stranger girls to rob the treasure; nobody ever taking the atelier in with the round of morning calls, or if so, the boy was sent to another chamber. A jealous guardian of his fair young charge he became indeed, and took right watchful care of this companion of his solitude. The boy had no desire to stray; liberty was his, had he cared to take it, but the servitude was a very joy, and the life a realized fond hope.

That the education should not falter the guardian carried it forward, and developed every good talent by moral teaching. The classics and the charms of history became the pleasant converse at the work, and their leisure was devoted to the loftiest reading in the languages. It was a dangerous age, and peculiarly susceptible nature, but the mentor steered with admirable discretion, and all his pains bade fair to mould a character of inestimable qualities. One trait alone was worthy of the super-tact bestowed—the whole-hearted, undivided love it yielded. This was a never-ending charm; the love was a beautiful devotion.

The sculptor's life is the life of still passion. The art-shaping poetry of marble is one of rare sensitiveness—to beauty of form or of character. And these men think much, reflectively; with a deal of quiet, deep intensity. The embodied thought that has peopled our houses and temples, our grounds and cities, with a pale, chaste, lovely race that, unchangeable, seems to mock our imperfect humanity, has written a language of sensitiveness that earth will never willingly let die.

"Had Raphael handled the chisel," says Lamartine, "he might have created a Psyche of Canova." But as a fact it is not every man's property model, this classic ideal of the soul. Greville Lovelace attempted a Psyche, and never artist went to the work with more devout ardor; but the block was barren, and the substitute would have served equally for one of Charles's beauties. He lived a life of homage to the Rhodian art; while his apprehension of the poetry in the antique was perfect, yet was he incompetent to render the spiritual head for overexpression of the physical. This *had* annoyed him; the feeling now became merged in involuntaryism, the face of his boy stole forth in the grouping, and the youthful beauty became ideal in the atelier. Other men might crowd their galleries with those who, as Pope has written:

> "Heroes in animated marble frown,
> And legislators seem to think in stone;"

but his desire was of an infinitely more tender type, and the sensitiveness to the love gave shape to the thought. His boy came out in the pure, colorless form around. Unknown to himself he got fashioning it when he thought to do a Cupid or a Mercury, and the long mornings saw quite a succession of these unconscious copies, until a stranger coming in would have read the story of the sculptor's love fully illustrated by its ideal artist.

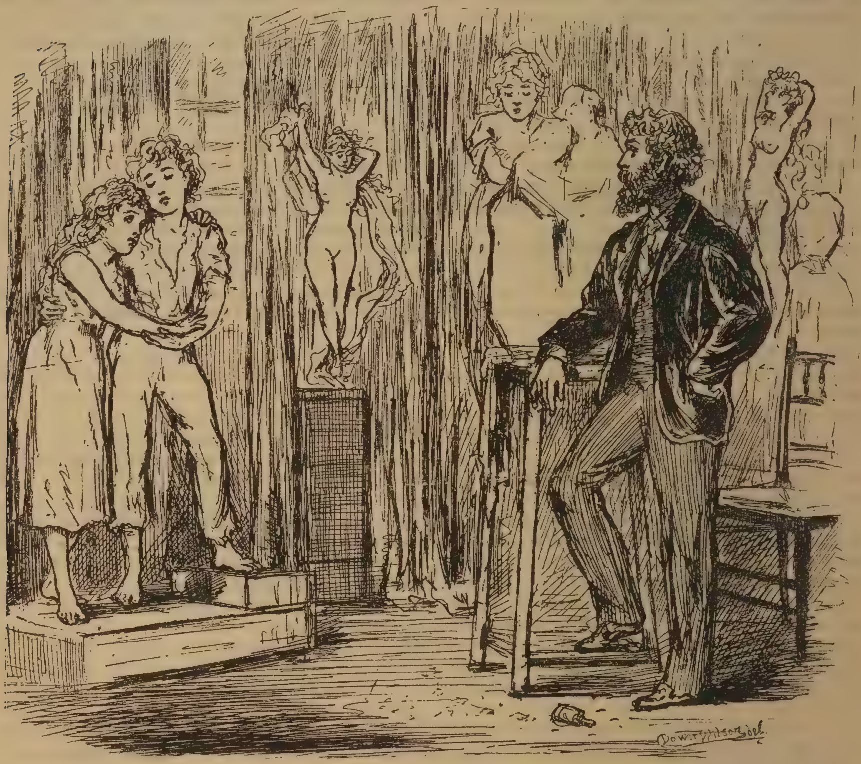
Now, somewhere, in years gone by, Mr. Lovelace had seen a splendid Paul, from Bernardin de St. Pierre's romance, and he set him to carve of stone another Paul, that it seemed, if only by reason of the model, should exceed in beauty the one remaining as vivid upon his memory as when beheld. So the boy, bared to the breast, beautiful curls all a-tangle, loaded with flowers and ferns, and supposed to be lifting Virginia across the stream, became the next fine work in the studio, and this gave sublime promise. The great sculptor would eclipse himself.

But the thing came out a mistake. Soul, ideality, beauty, were upon the execution, yet the study was imperfect; it was more than lifeless, for that it lacked companionship. Then the sculptor bethought him. As beauteous a Virginia, as graceful, and what life might not the study achieve? But where was the girl whose comeliness would parallel this boy's, or make a mate for such a Paul?

Then he remembered a sister, worldly and wise, who had wedded a banker; not for love, but the bank. A fair girl had come of it, turned at this time of twelve strong, healthy years. He did not believe in sisters, save in stone, and there had been little kinship; but once they had allowed his niece to do duty of courtesy, and stay a while at the lonely man's large house. As he was not skilled in amusing little girls, the visit was a failure, and she went home declaring she would never go again. The white things had frightened her and made her dream of ghosts, and the grim, echoing corridors had caused her many a scare. Well, then, as she grew older, the sister, who, like most wealth-wedded folk, was a bit of a prude, thought it better not. There was a something rude, something improper, about the idea of a house full of nude figures; not *quite* the school for a banker's daughter; besides, Greville was so peculiar! Thus it came about that he and his niece were almost strangers. But he wrote such a touching and uncle-like letter, and he must by this have put by so much, to say nothing of her being now a competent judge of good and of evil. So she was permitted to visit, with special injunctions on behavior and *belles-lettres*, and directions not to look at the statuary when any one was present.

The boy looked shy at first, did not half like this inroad, or approve the boisterous mirth among the quiet ones; but the uncle was very clever, and knew what he was about. He would submit to a little annoyance for sake of his art.

Yet how tenderly his gaze rested upon the boy's grave beauty, so much more pleasing to him.



"THE BOY CAUGHT THE SCULPTOR'S ABSORBED GLANCE, AND HIS EYES DROOPED."

The pose did not come off for some few days —he would not have it reported this was the motive of his invitation. Bankers are yet human— and meantime his models became better company. He saw the boy was not quite at ease, and pitied him, and was doubly kind; seeing which the girl would glide up and woo his dark eyes to smiles, looking hard to his soul with her strong, bright gaze.

In the second week the two were placed in tableau, arms and shoulders fair and bare as the company. The girl did not mind, for she wanted to see my lord without his jacket; but he blushed and trembled, to the chink of steel on stone.

The clever sculptor worked away delightedly, most innocent of the three, tossing his head back ever and anon to view the progress, and even thus sparing admiration for his boy, who, it must be confessed, had never looked more handsome, fretting uneasily as some lion cub in leash. Lovelace, who was more Greek than Saxon in the atelier, may have recalled the youthful ministers to Jupiter in the Temple of Ægium, Archai, who were all receivers of prizes for their beauty; and these boy contests were some of the most interesting established by the beauty-loving Greek. The youthful priests of the Ismenian Apollo were likewise chosen for this possession. A grave record is extant (Paus., ix. 10, 22; vii. 24) of the wondrous loveliness of the boys who took part in the procession of Mercury at Tanagra. To such excess was this adoration of the human beautiful carried, the Thebans had a law which subjected artists to disgrace who represented objects less beautiful than they were in reality (Ælian, *Var.*, iv. 4).

Thus grouped, the beautiful children presented a picture of rare poetry and a tenderness of design in perfect harmony with the theme. Well might the pair have stood for that superb piece, "The Birth of the Rose," taken from one of the few lyrics handed down to us from the Lesbian, in which, "The Rose," Sappho sings: "O Jupiter, if thou desirest to give a Queen to the flowers, a throne to Beauty, I recommend thee the Rose, daughter of thy first love!" The sculptor should have attained by this to matchless excellence over one at least of his models, seeing the exquisite repetition of that face. Yet the work seemed strangely difficult. He had selected a block of his purest stone, from the vineyard-crested quarry between Massa and Carrara, pure and dazzling, of the finest grain, as befitted this the exquisite crowning work of his studio: no veins, or blue-gray spots, or streaks of yellow, the common finding in the stone, but surely the crystal flower of that duchy in the west. Even the ancient Parian, warm, creamy, sensuous, or the gray-white majesty of block from Mount Pentelicus—alas! exhausted, but thus rendering the world's academy thrice valuable—was not more chaste. What was now wanting, when objects and material were not to be surpassed? The boy had to support Virginia so long a time that he plucked up courage and glanced aslant upon his burden, and all in a flash a new light shone in his eyes and upon his face. It was instant, but it was lighting of fire upon the altar. The sculptor caught that glow, and with it the inspiration of his theme; and the boy caught the sculptor's absorbed glance, and his eyes drooped. The girl made a grimace at the boy, and asked her uncle for a sponge-cake. It broke the rhapsody, and the sculptor ceased for the day.

But on the morrow it was repeated, and every day until the time allotted for her stay came to its end. Boy and girl were both dull that last day together, and the mighty artificer came upon some whispering behind the snowy statuary, but was so enraptured with his work he took no notice. He bade his niece adieu with courtly quietness, giving her a sovereign for sweets.

All day he worked away, scarcely missing the child; but then he had his boy, whose lovely face yet thrilled the room with warmth and light and color. Still it struck him the tone and tint and hue were a trifle quieter. He placed it to the credit of the white ones, whose dead, calm glitter was of course reflected upon his face. Next day at breakfast Mrs. Housekeeper came to him to say young master had the headache. She had taken him tea, and he would come down stairs after breakfast. Mr. Lovelace sat roasting his toes and reading something about the transit of planets, until enter the boy, when the grave-faced looked up with a happy smile and gave him welcome, bidding him sit beside the fire; and, remarking the paleness, said the confinement was telling upon him, and he must get out more. They would have the carriage, and go to a morning performance at the theatre—any thing to restore roses to that face. Midst of which came post-rap, and a letter from the niece, to say she had arrived home safely (he knew that, for one of his servants had accompanied her), and how much she had enjoyed the visit; a tiny flower dropping unseen by uncle, who did not believe in nieces. And when he looked round to address his boy again the color had returned, and he felt glad he had proposed that holiday, and just stepped up to take a peep at the troupe while the boy swooped to find the flower on the carpet.

They had the holiday, and on the day that followed returned to the atelier. He had set his heart on a piece he would call "The Dream," and the boy would counterfeit slumber, the attitude one of rest. There would be no strain on his strength for that, and the sculptor planned in his soul a masterpiece of poem-like work. Day after day he wrought at it, and splendidly it grew beneath the inspiring touch; but somehow, when he came to the face and brow, and down-closed eyes, and sweet-shaped temples, and all contour of the soul-part, he could not translate the life into slumber nor the slumber into life. His cunning was at fault, his grand Hellenic craft a myth; he could not limit the boy's soul to the marble, for the soul was no longer there; it wandered with the girl who had flashed like a star, but had taken his young, fresh love in her wake.

The sculptor tapped his chisel and wondered why the "dream" would not come forth. It was no more than block, despite the beauty and the youth. He spoke kindly to his model; he was to think pleasant things, of things he loved (thus said the sculptor, with a satisfied smile, thinking of self, you see). But no answer came. He went to the couch and found—the model had long ago gone to sleep in right-down earnest. Whereat he nodded to himself reflectively. The child was so used to simulating the peaceful state, this sleeping unawares was little mystery.

But now Mr. Greville Lovelace started with a wail, and a moan that hunted it round the chamber—the wherefore, merely a name and a broken kiss of a dream; but he knew by that the reason why the soul-light fled his artist hand. His art had overreached itself.

With one strong, fierce blow he dashed the beautiful figure of Virginia to the ground, where it strewed the ebon tiles with cruel and dazzling fragments, but leaving Paul, beyond one scar, where the union had existed, as free, as fine, as firm as ever. The noise awakened the boy from his blissful dream, and he discovered the grand poet-face distorted as by tempestuous fury, a very lightning in the eyes of late so gentle, and quailing a bit, he never moved, but saw the girl-friend broken to a thousand pieces; and then—that lion before the dismantled pedestal melting all on the sudden, falling upon his knees with clasped hands just below the marble Paul, while the passionate cry betrayed the bruised anguish of a life. "My God, not even this, but it is lost! Is there nothing human it is safe to love?"

"*Yes!*" murmured a little voice, and he looked swiftly up, to where beside him tearful beauty stood all eager to embrace him. Why, it was sweeter idyl than all his marble dreams, and looking from the chaste copy to the boy, he took the hand half sadly. "Our love of these, my dear, can never suffer, love them as we may."

"But *they* can not love back," whispered the little one, very tenderly. Then seeing his friend looking strangely upon the broken fragments, "It is broken;" and he drew the troubled face down and kissed it. The sculptor understood.

* * * * * *

After that, Mr. Lovelace attempted no more grouping. It was sculpture still, but *alone.* It was Adonai, son of the Star-beam; Mercury, nursling of Seasons; Hyacinth, the splendor of Flowers; Empedocles, the girl-boy ideal of old transmigration; Endymion, whose beautiful sleep on Latmos won Diana from the chase; and other classic youth, as beautiful and famous; but it was always ALONE.

And the sculptor found his joy herein. That white world with its exquisite realism was all-sufficient. He had in past times known the mighty longing for the vast which comes once in a way to such: for breadth sufficient for the soul, wide spaces and open tracks, great shining seas, illimitable plateaus and mountain summits piercing fleecy clouds, broad forests, far stretches of verdant prairie, shores and sloping downs, heaths and wide odorous commons, clouds and blue spans, space—space—space; the cry had been:

"Room! Give me room! Give loneliness and air."

But not now; there was content at last. And it is astonishing the little room, small space, demanded by the soul when something is found to love. Verily it is contented with a nutshell with that love for kernel. So much for the finite, which abandons its vast yearnings, its soaring unto breadth, and uprising into azure, for little wall-girt bounds that seem for some idol of clay a complete paradise.

And the boy loved the life, so chaste and still, save for that ring of steel on stone; loved the white world into which he had glided as by spells woven of phantasy; learned of his friend the language of the grander day; grew splendidly pensive, and felt the poetry, of which his soul was full, pervade his life with its calm seclusion, and he was happy as never before.

Sometimes he thought of a father, whose young, gifted life spent upon this thing had burned itself out with feverish brilliancy in a foreign land; of his mother, of whom he had seen so little, and whom he would not now even know, but who was beautiful, too beautiful, and whose love of the theatre ruined his father's happiness. And more often than of these he thought of his grandfather, loved with a love passing the love of boyhood.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY FLORA.

One morning in November, Lady Ellerby, returning from her drive, called upon Lady Comdarlington. The countess was at home, and sincerely pleased to see her friend.

After the compliments, "I understand, my love, you have been to hear our Minister. I am dying to know what you think of him."

Lady Flora looked grave, a deeper color dyeing the lovely face.

"I scarcely know how to put into words the opinion I have privately formed to myself. Frank, as you know, is enraptured—"

"Yes, but what do you think of him? Lord Ellerby is a great art critic, a most adequate and accomplished judge of beauty; but when it comes to ministers of the Gospel, I value your own opinion more highly. I know you to be ultra-fastidious."

"Oh, I don't think so. Before marriage my life was so very secluded, I positively had no opportunity of gratifying my fondness for attending the ministry of our best preachers. I have formed an opinion certainly," added the speaker, modestly, "but it is of little moment—"

"Yes, dear; now do let me hear it."

"Well, to confess, he realizes my conceptions of goodness—of culture—of refinement."

"In other words, you think him a darling."

"Hush, dear! Not *quite* the term."

"Bless you, the earl always hears me call him that—quite looks for it, I assure you."

"I have not got into the way of such familiar phrasing, nor do I think it pretty."

"Goodness, Flora! I hope you are not going to become a prude, and forswear words of affection? Ah! I understand; you preserve these for your husband."

"The proper person, I should imagine." And Lady Flora's exquisitely pure face was lighted up with enthusiasm kindled by her love.

"Yes; I do so admire your sentiments; they are new to me. I don't know whether old-fashioned or new-fashioned, they are certainly new to me. But I am glad you called; I was wanting to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes, I want you to tell me about this *protégée* of Lord Ellerby's. Who is she?"

Lady Flora looked rather bewildered. "I don't know what you mean, dear."

"No, I suspected it; then I ought not to tell you. If I were torn to pieces by wild horses, not a whisper should escape me likely to mar the happiness of a newly married pair like your pet of a self and your darling of a husband. As I said to Lady Pepper, 'These things are best found out alone.'"

With startled look the young wife rose from her chair, and crossing to the countess, sat down beside her upon the couch.

"What is this, dear? Tell me, what do you mean?"

"Well, the Hon. Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover—let me see, do you know them? No, I think Fanny said she did not know you. Anyway, they live at Kensington, you are aware, my dear. Driving the other morning, whom should they pass— But no, not for wild horses."

With which tantalizing expletive Lady Comdarlington set those rows of pearl close, and looked elegantly immobile. Whole worlds should not force her to utter another word.

To Lady Flora it was more mysterious than terrifying thus far. She was so utterly taken by surprise that this was the predominant feeling, but not after parting of the rows of pearl. Unsolicited, her ladyship the countess, apparently thinking better of her resolution, exclaimed, with genuine sympathy:

"I ought not to keep it back, and I won't. Nothing shall induce me to conceal this any longer; besides, you may be able to throw some light upon it. Don't think, my dear child, we take the slightest interest in it beyond regard for your own happiness, not the slightest, but we *do* feel for you. There—you know what the men are."

"No, I don't," said Lady Flora, simply.

"Well, so much the better; but you will do! As to trying to keep a handsome fellow in like your darling of a husband, it can't be done. Lived in Paris too. Spoil any man."

"But what is it, dear?" asked her ladyship, becoming seriously alarmed.

"Nothing, my dear child; I do assure you nothing. They are all alike; you are no worse off than I was, and we make up for it by adoring some darling of a fellow like this Garland, all tenderness, all sympathy. When one's husband takes to driving pretty models about the town it is high time to look for sympathy; at least I think so, and you know I am not one of what you may call the advanced school."

Gradually something wonderfully horrible was dawning upon the young wife's mind. Lady Comdarlington's motives were harmless in the extreme; she was but faithful to her instincts. But this rendered the communication none the less hurtful to her innocent friend. She turned with infinite astonishment and pain to the countess for an explanation.

"Well, I had it of Miss Glover, you know; quite an exceptional thing for dear Fanny to see or know any thing. But it is as Lady Pepper said to me this very day, 'It is not for well-wishers to make mischief.' Ah! it's a wicked world, a delightfully wicked world, my love; but what are we to do? One can't get out of it, that's certain, and yet to remain in it is fraught with so much peril. The men *are* so naughty, but your darling of a husband is a regular rogue. So sly of him! And you really didn't know of it? But of course you did not, you are so unsuspecting, and yet I almost wonder how it is you never objected to his being so much away from you."

Flora felt as though a good cry would be a relief, but she was not going to give way if she could help it, for this charming countess to entertain her friends withal.

"Frank has been away some few days, but I know he has a studio near town, and when taken with one of his painting fits he retires thither, he tells me, until it is over; you will admit to good purpose." And the devoted young wife even at that moment thought proudly of his lordship's paintings.

"This sort of retirement gives men too easy facility for the indulgence of their hobbies. Comdarlington wanted to retire in the same way—only not the same plea; billiards or something in that line; but no, thank you. I kept close in Comdarlington's shadow, and the consequence is the earl has been wonderfully good. It was I who trained him to love his church, and now look at him. When do we miss? Why, my child, we even go upon Christmas-day."

Flora bowed her head before this august admission, feeling sadly without the pale. Sometimes she had not been on Sundays.

"But your ladyship has not yet told me what all this is about."

"Coming to the point immediately, dear, is so essentially a business qualification, I do not study its principles; besides, it's brutal and low; but I will be candid, I will indeed, and if I pain your feelings, don't blame me, blame my candor. You must know that Lord Ellerby drives out with a most lovely creature, quite young, younger than yourself; pays this young and lovely creature marked attentions; is keeping this young and lovely creature at his studio: now *is* it correct? That's retirement from the world! Of a truth I don't know when they are naughtiest, in the world or out of it. Take my word for it, Flora, the sole confidence is the Church."

Yes, she was even then thinking of that man with the wondrous pity, him whose every word vibrated with his intensity of feeling. She did not know whom to turn to in this hour of trial; she only knew people of the Comdarlington order, and their complimentary commiseration but pained the deeper. She was sitting so forlorn and so unlike her usual self the countess kindly took the small hand in hers, saying:

"Do not let this trouble you; it will all come right, I dare say. These artist-gentlemen, you know, do take a fancy now and then to some striking face which looks well upon their canvas; but, bless me, if it was a serious matter, what imbroglios it would entangle them in!"

"I am much obliged for all your ladyship has told me; possibly it is as you say, but I am sure my husband will tell me all when he returns. Till then I have faith in him."

"Dear child!" murmured the countess, supremely affected, adding—

"Of course you will not mention my name, nor dear Lady Pepper's, nor Miss Glover's. Fanny is so sensitive to the least approach to a scandal."

"All you have so kindly told me is in strict confidence."

"Thanks, sweet, I knew you would; and now promise me the pleasure of your company to tea to-morrow—a really quiet five-o'clock tea, no ceremony, just a little enjoyable chat; *will* you? I shall think it so kind. Now *do*, dear."

And her friend promised, although feeling far from in the humor; but it was not Lady Flora's nature to refuse any thing that would give pleasure to another.

It was a comfort to arrive home, to retire to her chamber, to kneel beside her bed with the beautiful face buried in her hands, with tears making them moist, and sobs echoing through the solitary chamber.

And all the strangely romantic and unusual nature of her courtship flashed upon her in that moment. A mere beauty quest! And might not this lover of beauty, whenever and wherever found, pursue a similar quest again, should his fancy be taken as it had been in her own case? She shuddered.

Their acquaintance had been of but brief duration before marriage, for Ellerby was not the man to wait for any thing, least of all for a wife; but their love had been sincere, and Flora tried to think her husband true.

Whom to turn to in this emergency she knew not, yet felt she would give much for a friendly word of advice or comfort. Of all the select circle of their visiting acquaintance, she did not know one whom she could open her heart to upon a subject so delicate. They were admirable while it was confined to dress and fashion, jewelry and flowers; but oh, not for this!

Lord Ellerby had been so proud of his pretty wife he had introduced her rather freely, and her ladyship knew more very nice people than do the generality of young wives; but these very nice people were valued at their proper worth by Flora's calm sense. But *one*, genuine, stanch, true, would have been more valuable than all of them together.

Lady Flora had a suspicion that she was invited to meet Miss Glover, and she could scarcely contain herself, so anxious was she to ask that lady in person for particulars which her friend the countess could not or would not give. Not to become a spy upon her husband—Flora would have scorned the thought—but to ascertain the address of Lord Ellerby's studio, which she did not even know. But his lordship's day-or-so's absence had extended over a week, and she had received but one letter, telling her he was in the thick of a splendid study, which he should bring home with him for her acceptance. And she had been perfectly content, until this disturbing event occurred, and Lady Flora rested content no longer.

Her ladyship's carriage drove up to the Countess Comdarlington's slightly before time by etiquette, and her ladyship was shown to the drawing-room; but had scarcely crossed the threshold when she started and fell back a step terribly confused, for there rose to meet her with courteous ease the other guest—Westley Garland. Lady Flora knew this to be a heinous, if playful, intrigue upon the part of the lady of darlings, and with hand on door, she murmured her half apology—

"I beg your pardon—I thought—the countess—"

"Has but this instant left the room to search for a book of photographs. Permit me to summon the maid to take your bonnet."

He touched a silver gong while saying this, and with thoughtful regard for her confusion, placed a chair for her, and immediately returning to his own, was apparently absorbed by the book over which he was bending. And Lady Flora thought him excessively kind or excessively careless; she inclined to the former. His voice thrilled, it was so unlike the wide chorus of complimentary, flattering, insincere ones to which she had lately been accustomed. But he took so little notice of her presence there she quickly regained composure, and even stole a half-timid glance at the cause of her embarrassment. She could observe him better thus leaning over the volume, than when in the pulpit. All faces thus bowed in attitude of study possess a charm unlike that worn at any other time, when intellectuality becomes sculpturesque, austere with the soul-majesty men trace in stone. Yet it was no hard face, no rigid and unfeeling expression, loveless and cold; rather full of a melancholy more striking than any of the emotional aspects, and so manifestly tender and compassionate, Flora felt attracted by it, and drawn toward it as never by a face before. Still, she thought it singular he neither looked up nor spoke. Stay, "The maid seems a long time—could not have heard, surely," and he again touched the bell upon a side-table near by.

Lady Ellerby thought this Minister singularly cool. Further speculation was ended by appearance of the countess's tire-woman, who asked if it was her ladyship's pleasure to accompany her to the boudoir of the countess. Mr. Garland at once held open the door with affable politeness for Lady Flora to pass out, and while doing so, in thanking him, her eyes met his, and they were strangers no more.

Not a word was said, but she knew this man to be her friend, to be the friend for whom she had prayed in her trouble—genuine, stanch, true.

In the boudoir the countess, charmingly effusive, having kissed her friend, took the hands captive, looking deep in the quailing hazel eyes.

"Am I forgiven? I did so want you to know him! You'll be very pleased with him upon better acquaintance."

"Possibly; but I felt dreadfully confused. It was too bad."

Her friend laughed merrily, and tapping a book of photographs in her hand, said:

"Blame this; please don't blame me; I can't bear it, really. But take your bonnet off. What a duck it is! So glad the Minister saw you in this. And he will have to escort you home, you know, dear. Don't be nonsensical about it; he is walking, poor man! And he so soon takes cold. It is some distance, and only yourself in that elegant carriage. You are not inhuman; you were never unkind; you won't resist my plea?"

And Flora, as usual, assented, for the comfort of others, and at the expense of her inclinations.

After that they returned in company to the drawing-room. Still bent over the book, he might not have moved, he seemed collected as though in his own study; but upon entrance of the ladies he gravely closed the work, with evident interest in its theme.

"I am sorry," apologized the countess, "to have left you for so long; but there, you know what the ladies are! My friend, Lady Ellerby, whom you have seen before. Flora, Mr. Garland. Lady Ellerby and I are widowed for a while; thus your graceful acceptance of my informal invitation is thrice welcome."

"The earl is away from Brighton?" bowing slightly in acknowledgment of her compliment.

"In Ireland. And dear Lord Ellerby is—we don't know where."

Then the sad eyes read pain upon the fair face before him.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE ELLA REMEMBERS A NAME.

What was to some extent a blow, and altogether a severe annoyance, had befallen George Percival.

After the mortification of describing in brief to those in Queen Street all that had transpired, he had fled from the shocked looks, more galling than words, because one can not argue with them, and had done as many another has done in trouble—gone home to the one face that never looks shocked, be innocence or guilt the portion, and told a listening mother every thing. But she had something to tell which would grieve him more than he had grieved her, for she *knew* her son *could not* do as he had been charged. She was comfortable on that score, and merely said, with tranquil folding of the hands:

"If it is God's will that you should enjoy a little less prosperity, my dear, depend on't some wise prevision underlies it—something is in store which shall make up for all. And who knows," added the good farmer's wife, half to herself, "but that this strange affair may have been, after all, ruled for some purpose we can not now foresee?"

The strange affair was made comprehensible to George's horrified understanding in this wise: Little Ella had been walking in the road beyond the farm, had been seen by Mrs. Percival to quit the garden, and had been seen upon the roadway by one of their laborers, and—been seen no more. In her alarm Mrs. Percival sent some distance for the farmer, and he, on riding up, although it was dinner-time, never dismounted, but scoured the roads for miles. And one he questioned had seen a tall, queer-looking man walking fast along the meadows—the path leading to the railway station. Thither across country the farmer scampered, and in an hour came up with a tiny platform bare alike of passengers and officials. After shouting lustily for a quarter of an hour, some one heard him, and with drowsy leisure slouched to know the cause of the disturbance. Farmer Percival quickly made this known, and was rewarded by the drowsy one declaring he "knew naught about it, and didn't want." Anon a porter appeared upon the scene, and with information. He had seen a man and a girl, he remembered, yes, distinctly, because it was the last train that had gone, and these two were the only passengers—he quite remembered—they were booked for London. And here it ended. It had happened only that morning, and a nice way they were in, as well they might be.

And George heard, with a terrible numbness at the heart. It all seemed to have come at once, trial upon trial, as they have from Job's time until now, such things being too evil and too cowardly to go in single company. He had so looked forward to a season, if but a brief one, with the little girl. It was to have cheered him for the future, made up to him by gentleness for the rough experience of the trial; and now, *gone!* George felt benumbed, indeed, beneath it, but not for long, bestirring himself if for her mother's sake alone; and after quiet meal-time with his beloved parents, he, as much at their wish as by his own, returned to town, and gave the police a description of the child (and her companion, so far as was possible), and then went on to Queen Street as of old, much to Gabrielle's quiet joy, for she had been greatly wounded by the events of the morning, and thought the clouds were gathering very thickly about her. But she pitied George most of all, to think that he, so unoffending and so courteous, should have enemies, and be the victim of a cruel conspiracy, for this it was, Gabrielle felt well convinced; and it was matter of as great surprise as sorrow. But Gabrielle took firm ground in the matter, and that, the strengthening of her cousin. She knew he needed something more than passive sympathy, even active comforting, and Gabrielle laid aside all self entirely, and made the child the means of distracting thought from present trouble; but when he returned at even-tide and told her she too was lost, she was discomposed, and full of yet deeper, yet more unselfish, sympathy. If she could have gone out that moment and laid a hand upon the child, and brought her in to George, she would have done so, even though her heart broke over the operation; but it would not have been the case, she was too practical for that.

How much she felt to love him, now in the hour of his trouble! She could not help it; but would, had she dared, have wound her arms about his neck and taken of him the full burden of his care. Gabrielle did not do this; but she did stand beside him, a hand upon his chair, looking down upon the clear broad brow so pityingly; it seemed the eyes below there must be drawn upward by that magnetic power, that sublime emotion, which moved a fragile woman to the strength of heroines.

"Do not be downcast, George; all will be well. You did not need the bank; you can live without that; and, remember, it is but a day or two ago you talked of doing so."

"Ay, we often talk of things which, when they come and front us face to face, crush us most utterly. I do not fear the living. When I complete the work I am engaged upon, it is a living in itself, providing always the publishers will take it. I think, Gabrielle, most of this disgrace. God knows I am not proud, but I do like to hold my head erect; and how can I do this beneath the stain?"

"Few know of it, and for that few what matter?"

"It will spread like poison upon a stream, as these things do."

"But you will be cleared, and then the world will learn the cruel injustice done you."

"People never care to listen to that which clears, or to remember it. Have you not found it is the matter which is injurious they take most pains to ascertain and to remember? But I would have left this and escaped to some humble sphere, contented could I have sometimes seen poor little Ella. That is my great grief."

"My dear cousin, do you seriously take into consideration that there are other little girls besides Ella in the world?"

"It does not compensate me for loss of her."

"No; but it points an obvious possibility of discovering another. Events may be transpiring to place another in your hands, requiring even more care and protection than Ella. You will come and see us very often, George, if you are determined to leave the kind ones here?"

"I could not bear to face the prying gentility at every window whenever I set foot in Queen Street. For the other part of your remark, I do not think it likely."

"Well, George, you know I look at things in a very plain way, yet with a faith that is sometimes equal to much reasoning; and I hold to the opinion that dear little Ella would not have been removed from your care without some good cause. Perhaps it was foreseen you would become too fond of her—I always had an idea that when you did take to any thing it would be no insignificant attachment—and in that case to be compelled to part with her when Mrs. Travers had again a home would have been painful to you, I am sure. Now I think it very likely you will be thrown somehow in the way of another requiring a protector and guardian more than does this little girl, who, at least, has her mother to depend upon. I think you called me once your good prophet, did you not? Well, let me be your prophet now."

He revived under the influence of her words and cheering manner. He did not notice—it was so faint he could not—the veriest shade of sadness at her allusion to the words he had used of old time.

He took his cousin's hand in his, and gravely thanked her.

And then they talked anxiously of the whereabouts of the child, and of the possible cause of her disappearance.

"I incline to an opinion Mr. Beresford Travers is at the bottom of this—and yet Mrs. Travers never went out all the time she was with us, when likely to be seen; and even if he saw the little girl, he would not know it was his grandchild; besides, I believe he was in town at the time, or certainly absent from the Court."

"Is it not more likely to be that enemy of whom you have told me Mrs. Travers appeared in constant fear?"

"If it was known the child had been intrusted to my keeping, it is more than probable."

"There is some horrible web."

"From which I am about to release myself by retiring to complete obscurity. I found a highly respectable and apparently a comfortable home this afternoon, in a quiet street which lies at the back of the Euston Road. There I propose to devote all my time to my work. I shall have nothing to deter me, and should make progress."

Gabrielle heard with a heavy heart, and felt that, indeed, the dream was over.

* * * * * *

What had really happened to Ella may be briefly told.

Walking by the hedge-side, she came to a gate, beside which was a stile, where the foot-path across some meadows led to the town. Sitting upon the stile was a man, Bartholomew Rolf.

He spoke to her kindly enough. She answered him, and walked on.

Presently she found he was following her, and she began to retrace her way, meeting him a hundred yards back on the road.

The man looked hard at the child, and exclaimed: "Why, Miss Travers, surely I am not mistaken, I think!" drawing a letter from a greasy pocket, and looking down on the superscription.

"Yes," said Ella, eagerly, losing caution under the apprehension of the messenger coming from her mother, who might be ill.

Then he handed the crumpled missive to the child. "You are to read it now, please." She did so. This was the purport:

"DEAR LITTLE GIRL,—You will accompany the kind bearer of this, who will bring you to town at once. Do not stop for any thing.

"GEORGE PERCIVAL."

She had seen the signature many times before. She put the letter in her pocket.

"I must run and tell them I am going, and get my things together."

"No," said the man; "you will come with me, my dear. We shall barely catch the train as it is. There is not a moment to spare."

"But will you please to tell me what for? Why am I wanted so quickly?" She could only think of her mother.

"Something very important. I am only obeying orders. My instructions were to see you to town, and if you'll come I'll do so; if not, I'll go on," and he made as though moving off.

She said it was such a little way back to the farm she would just run in and tell them. The man said he would lose the train, and kept on the walk across the field. In an agony of perplexity she entreated he would but wait a minute or two. The man said it was more than his head was worth. It was a long, thin, cruel head, and it *was* more than his head was worth.

With tears she implored of him to wait, and he called back she could write all she had to say, but that if she didn't come along he couldn't wait. So she went with him, racked with pain for her mother's sake.

Upon arrival in London he bade her keep close to him or she would be lost, and the ill-assorted couple walked quickly in the direction of Gray's Inn Road. At a dead-and-alive sort of tenement in this thoroughfare the guide paused, lustily ringing a bell. The summons was answered by a slatternly serving-maid, the pitiable fag of the establishment of three sets of lodgers and the numerous progeny of those in occupation.

Bartholomew Rolf walked into a down-stairs front-room, where, upon an apology for a sofa, was reclining that particular blonde who at times caused such commotion in Queen Street, Paddington.

"How do, my dear?" said Mr. Rolf, with particularly indifferent affection, considering the lady passed as Mrs. Rolf. "This is the little gal I told you of, and you will take especial care of her."

The "little gal" was looking with wonderment at that astonishing construction, the plaited coil upon the lady's head, and she just turned to the child with, "Well, what are you staring at? Come here, child, and let's look at you."

The child went over to her, well scared by the grim welcome, and wondering where Mr. Percival was all the time.

"I don't think much of you." And the blonde turned pettishly to Mr. Rolf, who was occupying himself with drawing the cork of a bottle of ale.

"I expected you home last night, Bartholomew."

"Couldn't get away; never caught a sight of her till this morning."

Ella was becoming frightened. She looked very timorous and pretty to any eyes but those of this ferocious pair, of whom the woman, tawny as a tigress and as savage, was the most intimidating.

"May I see Mr. Percival, if you please?" civilly asked the little girl, but quite with the manner of having the right to ask to see that gentleman.

"Yes, you dare get asking to see gentlemen in my presence! There's no Mr. Percival here. The first gentleman you'll have the pleasure of seeing is Mr. Noel Barnard, I suspect."

The child turned white. That was the cruel enemy, and this a trap she had fallen into but too easily. The peril was imminent, but her presence of mind was equal to the emergency; she had not passed through the severe tuition for nothing. She quietly removed her hat and jacket. Mr. Rolf poured her out half a glass of foaming ale; this she declined.

"I think I can drink a bottle, Bartholomew," said the fair one upon the sofa, and Mr. Rolf drew the cork of another bottle. After which that gentleman went out, strictly enjoining Mrs. Rolf to take particular care of the child. But Mrs. Rolf went off to sleep under the effects of the novel she tossed to the child to read to her. Then Ella remembered the name of *Sir Horace Vivian, Belgrave Square;* thought also of a scheme of escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

A QUIET CUP OF TEA.

IF November can be pleasant any where—and, after all, there are balmy and genial days in the much-abused month—it is in Devonshire, and pre-eminently at Torquay, where nature seems to cling longer than elsewhere to the exquisite hues and softened air of autumn. "*Quel beau pays!*" cried the great Napoleon, when, a prisoner, he gazed over the panorama of Tor Bay. "*Comme* *il resemble La Porto Ferrajo!*" Of a truth the country about the charming town is as luxuriant through the winter as are many other parts of England throughout the more favored months.

Eagle Hall looked particularly comfortable and pleasant at this season. Its easy-going proprietor had a large idea of comfort and pleasantness, and to a door mat the interior must be the quintessence of luxury.

In an elegantly appointed chamber above stairs—Sir Kinnaird declined using the lower rooms after the thirty-first of October, in case there should be any damp about—at eight o'clock in the evening, upon the softest of couches drawn up to a sparkling fire, Sir Kinnaird was taking tea.

There was a bijou tea-pot worth a hundred pounds if a penny; three tiny cups and saucers as valuable; a cream ewer, of the time of Louis XIV., with sugar vase to match; the whole upon a miniature tray, placed upon a low ebony table made the exact height to accommodate the baronet upon this couch, without the pain of distending a single nerve.

But inasmuch as there was only Sir Kinnaird and his servant present, it will be wondered why three cups were placed. Did the gentleman expect friends to tea? No; the gentleman did not have friends to tea. Had he taken a hint from whist, and sat down to tea with a dummy, through sheer loneliness? Nothing of the kind; he did like loneliness, and did not like dummies. Loved to look upon this old china, perhaps—some heirloom? Not at all; he had drunk tea from these several times, but not yet even exerted himself to notice their pattern. The truth was, Sir Kinnaird entertained strong aversion to the contact with any thing too hot or too cold, and to remedy drinking tea too hot, while at the same time to secure temperately heated china, he made use of the trio of trifles, and doubtless was all the happier.

Simmons, Sir Kinnaird's private attendant, stood behind his master's couch, but within reach of the table, to spare the baronet the slight effort of assisting himself.

"Now, Simmons, we will try again."

The recent trial had been a fiasco, owing to the fragrant beverage not pouring forth the exact shade to please the fastidious drinker. The lady housekeeper, bent upon really pleasing Sir Kinnaird, took care, when the pot first came down stairs, to count the precise number of leaves therein, and from that time devoted an hour every afternoon to counting out a similar number from her pearl-inlaid tea-caddy, in order that he should have it exactly the same.

Simmons warmed a cup, measured a spoon and three-quarters of cream, looked carefully for the whitest lump of sugar, and was about to lower this with excess of caution in order that there should be no displeasing noise, when—

"Not too sweet, my good fellow; my palate rejects the saccharine this evening."

And while his attendant dutifully and with perfect respect looked the vase over for a lump some grains less, the martyr changed his position wearily, as though the endurance necessary to recline at ease was quite fatiguing. Something in the fire distracted the baronet's attention; something in the fire fidgeted Sir Kinnaird Dalton, and Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not to be fidgeted by fire or any other element. Simmons moved round immediately, with wonderful quietness, but immediately. There was not a sound while he raised the poker with an exquisite skill, and held the deadly weapon with a firm grip; then a low cough—a premonitory warning that might have been clothed in swan's-down, and—

"By your leave, I will slightly raise the fire, Sir Kinnaird."

"Do; just remove that coal, crackling, and fizzing, and kicking up a devil of a row. Can't think why they will do it. Worst of winter. Fire-place the desperado of civilization, and ruin to the nerves of sensitive folk. Wait, please: now."

Sir Kinnaird held his white hands close upon those delicate, shell-like ears, and in spite of this, and although the operation was performed with consummate nicety, winced painfully.

After this his servant returned to his position as before, and permitted the fluid to trickle from the diminutive spout until the cup was three parts full. Mr. Simmons would not have permitted an extra drop to overweigh the china; he knew just precisely the capacity of his master's strength. Something was wrong still; Sir Kinnaird was gazing with speculative interest at his tea; something was thereon or therein Simmons could not see, and Simmons was troubled. The baronet was about to speak, and might throw some light on it.

"Something floating here. Can't think how 'tis so many things get floating that ought not to."

"Allow me, Sir Kinnaird."

"You are very good; thank you." The private attendant removed a little "stranger."

"Pass it to me, please—or perhaps you'll see if he has started?"

Simmons walked respectfully to the most remote corner of the room, placed the piece of stalk upon the back of his hand, and silently, decorously, and in the usual manner, obtained the information. He approached his master with solemnity. Sir Kinnaird, upon raising his leisurely patrician head, put the query by a look, and Simmons replied, with the gravity of a Lord Chancellor:

"I expect him this evening, Sir Kinnaird."

"I beg he won't trouble, for I really am not equal to it."

Simmons adjusted a cushion below his master's elbow, aware by old experience that, whether in bed or on the couch, if two feathers did become united, Sir Kinnaird's delicate frame-work was certain to detect it, and suffer agony in consequence. Many a time, in the middle of the night, Simmons had been summoned from a calm sleep to rectify a catastrophe of the kind, and effect an immediate divorce with as gentle skill as was possible.

Something on the wall next disturbed Sir Kinnaird Dalton, and nothing in existence could be permitted to do this; rather should the wall be removed. It was the flickering of the fire-light upon the burnished gold of a picture-frame, and without a word the confidential servant walked upon tiptoe, jumped with unerring dexterity upon a chair, and removed the picture. The wall-paper was of French exquisiteness, and elfins gambolled in and out of garlands; but the same light caused these to flit without regularity or symmetry, and any thing without regularity or symmetry was not to be allowed in any residence in the occupancy of a Dalton. Simmons placed a screen, and darkened the chubby limbs of the riotous troupe.

Then was heard a terrific ringing of the great bell which commonly announced a call.

"I will go to bed; tell them I am indisposed, or at least unequal to reception. What a time of night to make that awful din! Oblige me by seeing into it, and have the wire cut."

With an expression of affliction Simmons retired backward. Outside was a white sheep-skin rug, and after cautiously closing the door, he raised the rug above the bottom of this, in order that no stealthy current of cold should penetrate beneath, following upon the disorder which appeared prevalent below stairs.

There was indeed exceeding great confusion below stairs for a mansion conducted upon principles of model tranquillity.

Simmons heard an unseemly shuffling of feet and a muffled contention, as though the servitors were impeding some one whose entrance was pressed with perseverance; and, much scandalized, he hastened to the scene, fearful that the disaster would destroy Sir Kinnaird's rest for many a day and night to come.

"Hush! hush!" implored the thoughtful fellow. "Do you not know our master is any thing but strong this evening? Such disorder may take fatal effect. What is it all about?"

"Here's an old man clamoring to see the earl. We have told him no earl lives here, but he won't take no for an answer."

Simmons at once went to the entrance hall, where a pinched and care-worn old man, with an aristocratic profile, stood with utmost politeness but resolute.

"I am Sir Dickson Cheffinger. I have not my card, but bear the name to the earl, and I am sure he will see me. It is upon urgent business."

Now Simmons, from long living with noble families, was strongly averse to a scene, and he had acquired a method of circumventing obnoxious visitors, which proved of inestimable service in Sir Kinnaird's household. He civilly ushered this gentleman into a small room—the farthest removed from the suite occupied by Sir Kinnaird—and invited the stranger to sit down for a few minutes. This Sir Dickson courteously declined, and thought he infinitely preferred his own man James to this well-dressed individual sleek and urbane as a dancing master. He again expressed a desire to see the earl upon urgent business.

"Perhaps I may explain, Sir, this is Eagle Hall."

"I know it—just what I want—I've come from town on purpose by rail."

"Sir Kinnaird Dalton, Baronet, is the proprietor here, Sir."

"Bless me, yes; now you put it quietly I do remember that to be the name. I've been knocking my head up against the Earl of Dartmouth; but never mind; Sir Dalton will see me. Tell him Sir Dickson Cheffinger solicits an audience."

"You will excuse me, Sir, but Sir Kinnaird Dalton's state of health does not admit of his giving audience at the best of times, and this evening he is dangerously indisposed."

"So much the more reason why I should see him—the man may die before I can come in the morning. Please take my name in to Sir Dalton."

Simmons was much shocked; this person nonplussed even his phlegmatic assurance; he adopted a resistful attitude.

"You understand, Sir, our master expects us to preserve him from the intrusion of strangers who may call at all sorts of times and seasons."

"My patience! I wonder what your master would say to my reception-rooms, thronged from morning until night! Suppose I made a trouble of receiving my guests, where do you think they would be? Out in the cold, I take it. But it pleases me to see 'em, and I don't keep them waiting in the entrance hall, or in a down-stairs room. When your master calls upon me he will be admitted to my presence at once."

Simmons began to think the man must be some very great sham or a very great person; he inclined to the latter, and made concession:

"The best I can do, Sir, is to go to Sir Kinnaird, and see if he is willing to grant you an audience."

"Grant me an audience indeed! Any one would suppose you served the monarch of Timbuctoo!"

With a very horrified expression Simmons withdrew, while the man people thought mad sat down, a pleasant smile upon the lined face. He was gaining his point, and that went a long way with Sir Dickson Cheffinger.

Simmons returned cautiously to his master, and as he entered started, with a heavy heart. Sir Kinnaird was stretched, apparently lifeless, upon the couch; but bending over him devotedly, the attendant discovered his master was calmly sleeping; and what sleep it was! The respiration of an infant could not be more untroubled. And while Simmons looked he shuddered, thinking of the ordeal in store for the unconscious fugitive from worry.

It would never do to awaken Sir Kinnaird Dalton—such vandalism would be outrage, in the opinion of this finished gentleman's gentleman—therefore Simmons leaned an elbow upon the mantel and waited; he would on no account have taken the liberty of sitting even in the presence of a sleeping master. It was while standing thus he heard a quiet voice say,

"Well, Simmons, have you set it straight?"

It was Sir Kinnaird, who had simply roused himself from one of those languid reveries when to speak was too much exertion.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Kinnaird, I thought you were sleeping."

"No; was going off, but the corner of my coat or some awfully hard thing stopped me. Tell me the time."

Simmons consulted the time-piece on the mantel, and in a low tone informed him it was half past eight.

"I make bold to tell you, Sir, a gentleman is below who wishes to see you upon important business; he sends up the name of Sir Dickson Cheffinger."

"You know me well enough to communicate an answer without giving me the trouble. I do not say I am displeased: I am null and void; I can not, under a certain term of hours, realize myself being so situated." Sinking back, Sir Kinnaird appeared to sleep profoundly; but presently started under the influence of a sudden thought.

"Strange, but I can not get it out of my head; he may have something to tell me relative to—to—er— Simmons!"

"Sir Kinnaird!"

"Just ask this person to send me up an inkling of his motive in desiring to see me."

Simmons retired, was absent a brief season, and returned.

Sir Kinnaird was not asleep, nor at all approaching it.

Upon receiving permission by a look, the attendant said, "I delivered your question, Sir Kinnaird, and the person replied that his business had connection with the former holders of the estate."

"I thought so; you can admit him."

When Mr. Cheffinger was ushered into the room Sir Kinnaird still maintained the recumbent attitude, but raised his head slightly and looked a little curiously at the singular visitor. He could scarcely tell if prepossessed or not, but he devoutly hoped the person would not make much noise. Mr. Cheffinger advanced with every delicacy, and without noise.

"I am sorry to find you indisposed, my lord; sorry to trouble you at this inopportune moment."

"He will persist upon elevating me to the peerage," thought Sir Kinnaird. "Now if any thing would bore me more than another, it would be that." Then to the visitor: "Yes, it is awkward. I had two minds about seeing you, but am interested in all concerning my predecessors here, therefore waived convenience; but you won't keep me long, please."

"Certainly not" (looking in the direction of Simmons, standing mute as an Egyptian). "We might converse more pleasantly alone." (Sir Kinnaird inclined his head—Simmons did not see it—the visitor addressed him) "Lord Dalton signifies you may retire."

Simmons remained perfectly stationary, but looking toward Sir Kinnaird, caught a responsive glance implying the assenting wish, and retired with undeviating obedience and respect.

"Now, Sir, we are alone."

"I will not detain your lordship long. I have the honor to be acting for the Rev. Westley Garland, of Brighton, in a matter of private munificence. Mr. Garland does much good—he has helped myself—a Cheffinger never forgets a service. I was requiring some engagement for leisure time—revenues of my estates not being yet forth-coming—and, very kindly, Mr. Garland deputed me to undertake a commission of delicacy. Mr. Garland is interested in the late lady of this mansion—in her little girl; he was the intimate friend of her husband, Sir Lionel Travers; he would help them. Conscientiously I have been upon the track. I traced Lady Travers and Miss Travers to the park gates of Lord Travers, and have since failed to make progress. I have recently seen Mr. Garland in London; I recommence with vigorous interest this absorbing pursuit. It was a suggestion on Mr. Garland's part that I should call upon your lordship, who, he assured me, would afford any information in your power, and would receive me with perfect courtliness, which your lordship has, I must gratefully acknowledge."

It was all very rambling, with odd mixing up of styles and titles, but there seemed something in it, some seed of interest in the welfare of dear old Lionel's unfortunate wife and child, and it only needed this to enlist Sir Kinnaird's sympathy; ay, and a sympathy mighty as any feeling he had ever experienced. It was there, beneath the natural or assumed repose and undisturbed serenity, and he was alert to the fact that another, and a minister—the most popular man of his time—was anxious concerning the fate of Mrs. Travers and her daughter, was actively exercising himself about the honored memory of Lionel; and Sir Kinnaird said to himself: "I declare now I could clasp that fellow Garland's hand more warmly than that of any man I know."

Sir Kinnaird himself had those at work upon this very business, and was at no illiberal cost in his indefatigable efforts to follow up the clew. He had believed this person to be seeking audience to further his own investigations, but it proved to be on account of those directed by the Minister. Sir Kinnaird was never equal to discussing celebrities, nor bearing them in mind; but in common with the rest of mankind he had heard of this Minister, and felt rather glad so important a person was enlisted in their cause.

"I am extremely indebted to your friend for his good opinion; my nerves do not admit of my seeing people in the general way, but I am glad to know yourself and friend are sympathizers with this lady, whom I consider very hardly used. I don't think I can help you; I wish I could. I should be as glad as any one to hear of their reappearance upon our planet."

It was all said so quietly the visitor was half in doubt as to its genuineness, and was a little afraid of a something underlying the words—something in the manner, it might be mocking irony, it might be a delicate cynicism. Mr. Cheffinger did not like it, but passed no remark; he had not crossed paths with a being of the kind before, and did not know such cynical armor may shield the most tenderly sensitive of natures.

The baronet was reclining at luxurious ease, head back upon his interlaced hands, eyes carefully shaded from glare of the lamp, yet with a flood of softened light upon the cheek. A line here and there might indicate that Sir Kinnaird was any thing but so young as he seemed; but more conclusive than these were the tranquil manners which are alone possible when years have lapsed to the halcyon era that succeeds the feverish unrest of the first three decades of man's existence.

"Of course we do not know that Mrs. Travers has remained in England. It seems to be a circumscribed space to confine research to."

Poor Sir Dickson looked scared; he did not feel in the least equal to more extended travel.

"It is in my power to help you some steps farther than Beresford Court," continued the baronet. "Mrs. Travers was for some few days resting at a farm by there, from whence she went to London. I do not know what for, but in all probability to seek for some lady-like occupation. If so, I shall no doubt hear where all in good time. It is utterly useless, indeed exceedingly improper, to flurry one's self about any thing lost, strayed, or stolen—sure to turn up—or, if not, it is our duty to pray the finder may be caused as little annoyance as possible."

Mr. Cheffinger thought of this languid piece of self very much as the nervous cleric thought of Paley, who, at dinner one day, feeling inconvenienced by a draught of air, directed the attendant to "shut that window behind me, and open one lower down behind one of the curates." But

Mr. Cheffinger had gleaned some little information, and felt proportionately grateful.

"Should you happily learn of the whereabouts, perhaps, my lord, you would drop a line to—to—I dare not say to myself, I so frequently change my hotel—say to the Rev. Westley Garland, Brighton."

"I shall be pleased to do so. If equal to it, I would run over and see your friend. I should much like to know him; but you have no idea, Sir Dickson, how I should suffer for many months afterward from the effects of the exertion. Some bodies will not bear overtaxing—mine is one."

"I can understand; your lordship experiences fatigue; but I do assure you," said the man they thought mad, with solemnity, "if any one is worth suffering fatigue for, it is the Minister."

"Well, Sir, I have told you that in the event of my gaining intelligence likely to interest Mr. Garland, I will write to him, or instruct my secretary to do so."

"Most happy, I'm sure."

Both gentlemen looked over to the portion of the room in shadow from whence the politely sarcastic voice proceeded, and Cheffinger shuddered, for from his position he could see the mocking face, the weird, glittering eyes that turned him cold. Sir Kinnaird, without stirring, coolly remarked:

"I did not hear you enter, Mr. Barnard."

"I am so careful of your nerves, Sir. I know with your susceptibility to noise the lighter the footstep the more agreeable. I came in soon after Sir Dickson Cheffinger, whom I have the honor to be acquainted with." At a stride he stood by the side of that unfortunate gentleman, who had thus unwittingly put his head into the lion's den, holding forth a talon-like white hand that curlingly gripped the trembling digits of Sir Dickson.

"Good gracious!" murmured Sir Kinnaird, wearily, but not as in the least surprised, so prepared was he for the supernatural appearing or disappearing of his diabolical secretary, or for any acquaintance he might possess: terribly annoyed, nevertheless.

"Has Sir Dickson Cheffinger partaken of refreshment?" inquired Mr. Noel Barnard, hospitably.

"No, Sir Dickson Cheffinger has not," replied Sir Kinnaird, stretched upon his back, following Cupid at kiss-in-the-ring with the elfins, and worried exceedingly by the flickering of the fire-light upon Sir Dickson Cheffinger's greasy old hat; which, from continual mislaying, he had taken to holding very tight whenever off his head; and which at this meeting he fidgeted with until it became like unto an uncertain Catherine-wheel before the quivering baronet.

"Then perhaps Sir Dickson will do me the honor to accompany me down stairs, where I will see that Eagle Hall shall yield its best in recognition of Sir Dickson's mission." And no sign coming from the couch, where, apparently tired out, the noble martyr rested passively unconscious, Sir Dickson assented, and followed the tall form forth to the shadowy corridor, on to the shadowy landing, down the shadowy stairs, across the shadowy hall, and into the small, plainly furnished parlor reserved by the secretary for his private occupancy.

"Sit down, my dear Sir Dickson; I'll go and see what our larder provideth."

The poor gentleman thought it chilling after the sumptuous elegance of the pretty chamber above stairs. Neither had he desire to eat; but Mr. Barnard was not a gentleman he could say "No" to, and there was a mystery, legal and otherwise, surrounding him like a fog; so that the most and the least Sir Dickson could do was to remain inoffensively agreeable to any thing.

Mr. Barnard returned, followed by a maid bearing a variety of excellent trifles from the epicurean larder, and Sir Dickson partook sparingly and of the very plainest of the fare, rather vexing his kind entertainer, who, having selected them himself, recommended first one dish and then another as particularly worthy the honor of Sir Dickson's attention; but the ordinary rule of abstinence observed by the poor gentleman decided him upon declining these with thanks.

After the ceremony Mr. Barnard said, "It's an exceedingly dark night, and rough walking down the hill. I'll bear you company as far as the town, and talk over our matter of business. My respected partner has ascertained something eminently important from Sir Claude himself, which I know you will feel interested in hearing."

"I shall think it kind, Sir; but it is taking you out on an unpleasant evening."

"Oh, don't think of it, I beg. I'm sure, to be of the slightest service will be a pleasure. There will be a particular satisfaction attending it. You are sure you won't take a little whiskey before turning out into the cold?"

"Thank you, I never take it."

"Then I do, always; so you'll excuse me?" Mr. Cheffinger bowed with grave politeness to Mr. Barnard, and Mr. Barnard bowed with grave politeness to Mr. Cheffinger; and Mr. Barnard took a little whiskey, explaining pleasantly: "My sympathy with Ireland is extreme, my regard for Scotland uncommon. I blend my national love in capital spirits, singing GOD SAVE THE QUEEN! Come, Sir Dickson, we will venture, and if you would see the lovely lanes of Devon at their most impressive, see them by this light."

"And why am I excluded from this artist's stroll?" It was Sir Kinnaird, who sauntered negligently in, equipped for walking, gracefully collected, and not troubling to notice the scowl upon the pleasant face of Mr. Barnard.

"Never knew you turn out this time of night before," muttered the secretary.

"Well, the fact is, I never had so much occasion. The last friends of poor Lionel Travers came and went by daylight. Er—Simmons—just walk behind with my stick; it is too heavy for pleasant company. Now, Sir Dickson Cheffinger, your arm."

CHAPTER IX.

APOTHEOSIS OF THE FELINE.

LOOKING out of the window of her tasteful breakfast-room, Mrs. Vincent saw the postman approaching; and it was characteristic of this charming person that in lieu of becoming flurried with expectancy, as are some good folk upon receipt of an expected missive, she merely placed the crested trifle in the pocket of her neat morning gown, and proceeded with directions respecting dinner, with commissions to the trading establishments having the honor to serve the Mistress of the Cottage, with instructions for the gardener, and a message to the laundryman, and a variety of incidental matters connected with home rule which the lady was far too methodical and systematic to neglect for the reading of letters. But when all was neatly arranged and in perfect order, she did sit down for a quiet quarter of an hour over the letter to her hand that day. It bore the crest of the Lindons upon the seal, and she cut round this, not because she had waited so many years for the coming of this crested thing, but that the seal might be copied smaller for her own use.

"There is no telling how soon I may need to write letters signed *Anna Lindon*," said this far-seeing diplomatist curtly to herself. "The middle class use monograms, and the twisting of initials is not in accord with my notions of regularity. I like a good honest crest; something awe-inspiring to the vulgar, something those without the pale can not imitate. All my life I've hankered after a crest. I've gone carefully back as far in our pedigree as it is safe to go, for somewhere one of us departed this life for sheep-stealing. I have stirred up our ancestors prudently, disinterred old records, inclusive of black-profiled eminence and worth, and some coverless Bibles, valuable for their registry sheets, and I am sorry to say our people were inferior, in point of caste, of reputation, and of morals, and I have been quite unable to discover sign or symbol, bird or beast, capable of being construed into a respectable crest. It is time there was one in the family, if there ever is to be one. Let me but possess this haughty device of the Lindons, and I'll—I'll embroider my night-cap all over with it."

Smiling pleasantly, the widow leisurely yet all daintily removed the letter from its sheath.

At the first glance she saw the writing was tremulously done—excitable penmanship, strokes recklessly darting hither and thither, letters that seemed dashed broadcast, words of lunatic wildness, helter-skelter above and below their line, blurred, misplaced interjections, and a troubled surface inexpressibly sad. She had gone through his books so often, the fluent, manly hand was familiar as any writing in her possession; but this was not of the same. There was riven, smitten, anguished dismay and grief underlying it; there was the passion of instant emergency, the half-paralyzed confronting of some deadly peril.

She read it again and again with a wonderful relish and a little approving lady-like smile.

"My Friend,—I did not expect so soon to write you sorrowing. I dare not think of the decision you arrived at when considering my Lena's portrait. How your heart will thrill with sympathy upon reading that I am bereft of my darling. I returned to find her fled from here, whither no one knows, and all my efforts thus far fail of discovery. I am so stricken by this blow I can scarcely write with sequence. You will pardon this. Ah, my friend, how little I contemplated this new great misfortune when we talked of that which has been, since my last trouble, the one consolation of life! Your friendly clasp of the hand was very welcome to me; the expression of your solicitude will now be as grateful. We agreed upon this interchange, or I would not intrude my sorrow upon your notice, and I have told you the story; its sequel will grieve you. Ever faithfully, Lindon."

"Not exactly, my lord. I think it serves you thoroughly well right. A pretty thing, if all the men in the land were to do as you have done, when they ought to get lawfully rid of their wives and provide for the widows! Well, Lorry, my beautiful, roguish Lorry, will have less travelling to do. I'll walk to Seaborough and telegraph him that a letter is on the road. Only to think of this now! Is it not wonderful how things work round? It's a complete piece of fortune; his heart will be so tenderly prepared for that to come. And the men are clearing off: next week the furnishers will be here, and a month—a month—and my queenly traitress, clinging so boldly to this honored name and title, will be here. Now let me think. What's the time?—9.15. At 10 a train to town; good! That friendly welcome clasp of hand shall be repeated, the solicitude so grateful shall be expressed. Leave him to the friendly solicitude of that Mrs. Brandon, and sit here patient another ten long years while this attentive, thoughtful sympathizer fulfills the mission I should be engaged upon? Not quite. Run up stairs and put your things on, Anna, and waive the unpleasantness of travelling alone; this immediate necessity does not come every day. We're going to penetrate this boarded retreat, and demolish Madame Brandon and the rest."

And in her chamber, at an elegant little writing-desk always kept there, she wrote this note to Lorry:

"My dear Boy,—A hurried line to tell you the pretty bird has flown; this will relieve you of preliminary difficulty. Of course she is in London—they always fly thither—but I shall gain further information in a day or two, when I will write you again. I hope you are very good, and working very hard, yet sparing leisure to think sometimes of your fond and loving mother.

"P.S.—Be very careful in the great city where there are so many temptations. Remember your dear mother's precepts and example, and be very particular.

"P.P.S.—Be sure and keep your eyes open in the streets, and if you see a pretty girl any thing at all resembling the portrait, speak to her, my darling, speak to her."

She then habited herself in the chaste costume reserved for travelling, no outrageous style for the attracting of notice upon the platforms, but a useful yet becoming fashion in quiet color, the design of which would mix in the crowd without winning attention, yet if observed would be admired for its taste.

Then, the maid bearing a small bag, the lady proceeded across the Green and along the village street, and Sleperton wondered with a mighty wonder. Then by way of Seaborough Old Town, and at dinner that day there was great concern in Seaborough Old Town. Then through Seaborough to the station, and a thrill went the length of township.

The neat maid, having received specific injunctions, quitted her mistress, that lady betaking herself to the telegraph office, where she dispatched this message to her son:

"Take no steps until hearing from me. Letter on the road. Meanwhile make use of your time in London."

By the ten-o'clock train for town this business-like person followed in the wake of her telegram. Upon arrival she checked the desire to take a cab to Lorry's and chance his being at home, and instructed the man to drive instead to King's Cross. Twenty-five minutes to wait for starting of a train to the north. And she fretted at that, sitting upon a seat on the platform, following joining of the boards with her umbrella, looking up slyly from below the long lashes at the men and women walking up and down, and saying to herself: "My future husband will eclipse them all."

It was slow. She walked to the book-stall and looked at the books, a very favorite occupation, more so than buying. She read a little love-bit from this, and a little love-bit from that, and skimmed the cream of half a dozen, as encouragement. She looked at all the pictures, much taken by the scene where a very neat and lady-like person stood at an altar with a handsome fellow uncommonly like Lord Harold; and finally purchasing one that took her fancy, was absorbed for the remainder of the journey. And then commenced the memorable advance upon St. Aubyn's Fortress. Whither we will precede the widow, to learn how matters are progressing.

It appeared as though Mrs. Brandon was making considerable progress; indeed, her softly solicitous manner and invariable composure did exercise a species of soothing effect, and her condolence, never obtrusive, always well-timed, if not consoling, was at least not displeasing.

Mr. Arden drove over every day, and although he had been unable to throw any light on the mysterious affair (he was ignorant of that encounter by the garden), yet the visits of his kind old friend helped to sustain St. Aubyn, who recognized the deep sympathy prompting the daily attention, and, more than this, the spiritual support delicately placed in its fairest and most benign light.

One thing may be noted. Mr. Arden did not credit Martha Saxe with having any hand in Miss St. Aubyn's disappearance.

The old pastor's love of Mrs. Brandon was not increased; but as St. Aubyn's was one of those fine natures disliking above all things any insinuation levelled at those in his employ, the question was avoided; and as the lady seldom favored the pastor with a glimpse of her black and white presence, she did not cause him, personally, any discomfort or inconvenience.

To say that St. Aubyn had by any degree overcome the loss of his treasure would be to make an erroneous admission; the dull, benumbing pain was present like a canker; especially when alone did the terrible consciousness prostrate him. Hence imperceptibly yet most certainly did he find some beneficial result accrue from the society of Mrs. Brandon.

He knew that she had removed every thing that would remind him of Lena, and, by reminding, cause him untold anguish, and he thought this very kind of her. She never alluded by so much as a word to the child; had changed the room where they partook of meals; had removed the garden chair whereon the beautiful princess had been wont to read reclining in the sun, in order that it should not be within sight from the windows; had made another bed-chamber luxurious for St. Aubyn, transferring furniture, and having fires there daily, with intent he should not have to pass *her* chamber door; had folded the lion-skins whereon the romp had been used to roll, and stored them far away in a distant garret, peppered and brown-papered, for Hortense, who was privately making all arrangements for assuming the mistress-ship per matrimony, had no thought or intention of allowing valuable skins, or "wild beast hides," as she termed them, to become a prey to that lively insect the moth.

And all that she did was appreciated by St. Aubyn, as such deeds are by those laboring with some horrible sorrow and striving to be brave when all the time one's very sinews seem parting beneath the strain. He was not one of those who can break away from sorrow by a frantic descent upon the whirling pleasure of a metropolitan season, nor of those who go rushing off to Norway or some entirely new tract where they may, perchance, forget. There was no happy Lethe from which this man might drink, no *nepenthe* that would assuage his grief. Yet even as we are grateful to the hand held kindly forth, bearing the cooling draught when low with fever, he was grateful for the forethought of this woman. And each day waited issue of the skill of those his gold had sent upon pursuit; the first talent in the detective department, chief experts at tracking those daily disappearing, master-craftsmen upon trail, ay, human blood-hounds, the prime reserve of the leading private-inquiry offices, those subtle and swift as hawks and as certain, and the most clever men Scotland Yard could furnish. And with these alert and active, these spreading a net from bound to bound of the huge city, these applying their utmost ability, spurred by the enormous reward offered, and proposed to be doubled should the child be brought to him within three days—encouragement such as the oldest detective could not remember—could more be done? No, he admitted not. He was not fitted for entering upon any portion of the search himself—such occupation would have been loathsome, strong as his love was—but by all other means it was possible to think of without his own personal action did he testify to the intensity of his painful interest in this grave pursuit.

Mrs. Brandon knew something of it all, but nothing like the extent to which operations had been carried; she yet knew sufficient to cause her unlimited disgust, and to again and again repeat to herself that query of so vital moment—

"Whatever is there in the chit to warrant all the fuss?"

Eminently cautious, the lady placed before herself the contingency—it was scarcely probable, but one never knows what those clever ones may unearth—of Lena's being restored; how would it affect herself? Well, this would just depend upon the sort of construction the child would put upon her (Mrs. Brandon's) conduct. She, of course, in the event of such an accident, must appear the most delighted in the house at her return, must greet her with excess of affection that would outshine even the welcome of St. Aubyn himself. She was not demonstrative; no, she was not demonstrative; but to save her neck could exceed her habitual enthusiasm. But, in good sooth, the lady calculated upon a very different termination to this. If Miss Lena St. Aubyn did not look out, as she scornfully said to herself over that precious face within her locket, she would return to find papa had taken a mamma, and then let Miss Lena St. Aubyn see which way the wind blew!

Mrs. Brandon could tell as quickly as any one, and quicker than most people, the leaning and bearing of temperament and disposition, and she remarked, with quiet gratification, how that poor wounded soul, yearning for solace, inclined to her devilish sympathy. (A spade is never more necessarily called a spade than when under the conditions of hypocritical solicitude.)

It was a time of supreme anxiety with Mrs. Brandon—a time when she felt it incumbent to make hay while the sun was behind a cloud. Accordingly upon an evening when St. Aubyn was sitting moodily smoking his hookah, trying to fix his attention upon publications of the Presidencies recently to hand, and failing lamentably; looking with disconsolate pain around that sumptuous interior where, monarch, he was more unhappy than the most wretched of those carvers in jet whose cottages flanked the pastoral field of his old clerical friend; sitting alone, reviewing vast sorrows and mighty griefs that oppressed the soul as by leaden weights, reviewing astonishing joys that strung them like jewels, or the more splendid beams of radiant dreams that quiver by us but a moment and are gone, and with all the retrospect endeavoring to catch up shreds which might betoken hope—although he felt with intense bitterness that, even did his child return, it would be no longer the Lena of old; and he was in the depth of this sorrowing reverie when there came a gentle tap upon the door, an exquisitely gentle tap, which the most wounded of hearts would not resent. It was Mrs. Brandon, with her thoughtful—

"I feared you might be feeling dull, Sir, and I venture to ask if I shall have a fire lighted, and the large candles."

"You are very good. I have no objection."

And, of course, while this was proceeding it was natural she should quietly sit down to work, watching operations. Natural that, by accident, she should continue sitting, continue working, watching operations. Apparently he did not remark her presence; the clouds, fragrant as the perfumed water through which they had passed, wreathed about him, almost hiding the handsome face. She very gently proceeded with her needlework—a delicately slender needle, conveying the finest cotton through the softest muslin manufactured—and very gently coughed. A denser cloud, a slight jerk at the silver bowl. Slowly the eyelids of the black and white lady lifted, serenely the fingers plied, while the keen eyes travelled round the drawing-room, where the panelled graining, the tracery of gold, the glistening rafters upon the golden-studded ceiling, were dim and beclouded. There was a lull, a hush, and she did not cough again. It was the season for speaking.

With voice so low it rather soothed than disturbed, stealing in and out those clouds, and not by a breath agitating the most sensitive, sweetened even by the transit, turned with a gentleness insinuating and subtle, burdened with a perfect well of sympathy, and by very modulation of its hesitative utterance, the half-apology required by the intrusion, it was thus she commenced:

"I do trust not to be thought insensible, Mr. St. Aubyn, to the finer feelings if I venture to hope that your mind may be set at rest before very long; it pains me more than words can tell to see you so melancholy and dispirited, your peace destroyed, your health suffering—that health so precious." A little pause here, just long enough to give him opportunity for reply, if so minded. There was no reply. "All right," she said to herself, "perhaps he'll speak presently;" and she continued: "I shall appear very bold, but to me it seems a grievous injustice to yourself. Of course I know little of the story of your life, never having been one to enjoy the privilege of your confidence, but I am able to fathom much of it, and my heart bleeds for your past. More so than for the present, because Lena, dear rebel, had such thoroughly Bohemian tendencies."

"Not a word about Lena, if you please, Mrs. Brandon." Her champion even in her faithlessness.

"Not a word is said *against* our darling; I but mention her name in tenderness; and although your wounded heart forbids assent, you yet feel I speak the candid truth, and with the solicitude of *a mother*. Ah! had but that dear child a mother, some presiding guidance and governance in the household, what a wealth of love might be developed in that young bosom!"

"You will excuse me," said St. Aubyn, with grave displeasure; "her love needs no developing. I am satisfied her love for myself is perfect."

"I am sure of it," replied the quiet woman, with decision; "it is what I *so* much admire in her. I simply allude to the centring of that love. I need not tell yourself, of course well acquainted with our sex, that the love of a child of Miss Lena's age is a very different thing to that solemn and sublime feeling entertained by some staid and spiritual woman whose life is passed partly upon this earth and partly in a higher and better sphere altogether; one who, like yourself, may have known trouble, sorrow, treachery, and perfidy; one like yourself, with wound barely healed, yet one whose moral strength confers resignation, whose calm patience bestows unending peace. Such is the mother our dear, dear child needs at her age so much. Happy the child who can lay her head back upon this mother's bosom, and whisper all her love for parent-guardian-friend!" This was spoken with plaintive earnestness, the very tone carrying conviction of the speaker's sincerity and disinterestedness. She was thinking, "That *ought* to do it," when Williams appeared, rather flurried, and making signs to some person in the shadow—signs evidently the said person refused to recognize, for, advancing with considerable elegance and grace of movement, the redoubtable Anna Vincent confronted Hortense Brandon.

St. Aubyn arose with pleasure, and immediately gave his hand to the widow, who, saying to herself, "High time I came, I think!" bowed very graciously, while her friend introduced the ladies one to another.

"Mrs. Brandon, of whom you have heard me speak with esteem. My friend Mrs. Vincent—an old friend," said with that polish no term of seclusion will eradicate. The quick, restless eyes of the widow met the hard black orbs of St. Aubyn's sympathizer, and, as expected, found herself well matched. A very duel between these principals in finesse and state-craft was imminent. The widow administered a blow to begin with—

"I thought the most satisfactory way of replying to your letter was by acknowledging it in person."

The adversary moved a step back, the black silk of her gown emitting a hissing sound, which the softer and more noiseless vestments of the other, falling fold within fold, seemed to despise as a trick, and ignore accordingly.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure," replied St. Aubyn, with marked cordiality; "but however did you find the way to our remote and out-of-the-world retreat?"

"Well, you know where there is a will there is a way—at least one has to be made." And with a very charming and playful smile the lady removed her bonnet.

"Mrs. Brandon will show you to a chamber—the best our house will furnish, madam—and, believe me, I give you hearty welcome into Yorkshire."

With her most elegant recognition of his courtesy, Mrs. Vincent bowed and expressed her thanks.

As requested, Mrs. Brandon conducted the visitor to the most luxurious of the upper chambers. When the maid had lighted toilet and other candles and had retired, Mrs. Brandon, with grave and velvety politeness, begged the lady would mention any addition to her comfort their house could provide.

"Many thanks," said the other, looking round. "I think a fire, later on—nothing more."

This said the far-seeing woman, because she was quite under the conviction the ruling deity of this solitary mansion, not being very well able to tumble her over the cliff, since she never walked upon the edge of any thing, would not hesitate to put her between damp sheets, and Mrs. Vincent was much too partial to elegance of mien to brave the possibility of ungainly rheumatism.

The silk rustled, trailed over the carpet, hissed in the doorway framing the never-to-be-forgotten face, rigid and colorless as marble, with the brows and eyes, once grand features, and even now the noticeable point about the presentment; a faultlessly white collar and jet brooch, white cuffs meeting over the apron where hands joined as by geometric precision; not a tall woman, scarcely as tall as her rival, but standing in the doorway that instant at her tallest, breathing thick and quick as one breathes in sudden exigency, and taking in from that position the other standing in the glare of lights, youthful-looking, with an exquisite bloom on cheek, a fascination of manner a heritage of itself, magnificent hair falling now unloosed far lower than the waist, a blithesome, debonair behavior which, while captivating, was eminently well-bred, and a grace of deportment striking and prepossessing; and taking this view at a glance, Mrs. Brandon considered it a crisis. She was too good a general to betray annoyance, and too thorough a designer to experience confusion; her tactics were awfully disconcerted, but she believed she saw through it. Her belief came out in this very quiet remark—

"I trust, madam, Mr. Noel Barnard, last time you heard from him, was very well?"

The *coup* was tremendously sudden, but Mrs. Vincent was too consummate an artist and too habitually prepared for any side thrust to be taken unawares. With perfect simplicity and particular frankness she replied:

"Last time I heard of that astonishing being he was very well. You are interested in Mr. Noel Barnard?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am, and in any friend of his." Having said which with exasperating effect, the quiet lady, with a mock courtesy, retired, closing the door gently.

"As sure as my name is Anna Vincent, this is a pretty kettle of fish, an uncommonly deep move of Noel's—keeping himself acquainted with my lord's actions through this demure piece of goods!"

She looked leisurely round the apartment, in the drawers, in the wardrobe, inspected the rare ornaments upon the mantel, examined the texture of fabrics and upholstery, admired the bed-fittings, criticised pictures upon the walls, felt the weight of the thick curtains by the window, scrutinized the lace upon the pillows, noticed the stitching of the eider-down quilts, and, lastly, looked at herself in the great cheval-glass, remarking to the reflection there presented:

"If any thing, Anna, you look the better for the journey; it's the keen wind. I declare my cheeks tingle now, but I do trust my nose isn't red! Now mind your p's and q's, and bear in remembrance the Lindon crest."

She rejoined the master. The pale lady was at her work.

"You will take some refreshment?" asked St. Aubyn.

"Nothing, thanks, until your regular meals. What a delightful place you have here, up stairs and down!"

"Yes, it serves to pass life away in, or has served." Said with pathetic sadness. "I hope your son is very well?"

"Very well last time I heard from him. He is still in town. Lorry would like to see your pictures."

"They are of little value; a few sketches made in the East."

"They are very beautiful. Do you not think so, madam?" The lady addressed looked up from her work, and—

"I think all Mr. St. Aubyn's drawings evince unusual talent, madam."

"May I see your books?" (eagerly interested.) "But no, it is taking you into the cold," (deeply solicitous.) "Some other time—to-morrow morning."

"Nay," said the scholarly recluse, rising and leading the way to his collection, "we are not so indolent as all that, I hope. You will not find them as considerable as the library you are accustomed to, but such as we have are of value." And he preceded the lady, opening the door of an apartment upon the opposite side of the hall. She had proposed this, hoping for a little private conference, but upon looking over her shoulder, saw the silent lady had followed them like a shadow. Without appearing the least in the way, or in any degree as interested, Mrs. Brandon was gently closing shutters, lighting tapers, brushing a speck or two of dust from one or other of the richly bound volumes, with other unofficious movements sufficient plea for her presence.

Mrs. Vincent leisurely inspected the books with much interest, but the pale lady did not seem to go, and after a while the visitor asked:

"Have you any music? Of course you would have."

"We have an organ, and—a—harp," by an effort, the eyes of both watching keenly.

"Dear me, how long it is since I played upon the organ! Not since the patron of our church and village went abroad." Mrs. Brandon noticed the man's face flush at that.

"I could not now play before any one, or I would ask you to let me see if I have quite forgotten those chants I at one time loved so well." Mrs. Brandon quietly left the room.

CHAPTER X.

A QUESTION OF PROPRIETY.

PERHAPS no one in town enjoyed the esteem of his fellows with more legitimate right than Sir Horace Vivian. The family was super-stainless; quarterings on the arms outrivalled each other in spotless associations; never a lineage came out so dazzling with pure antecedents; not a representative noble in Burke more stringent upon decorum. The Vivian household was indeed of unparalleled propriety. Of course to hope for a definition of the improper at the hands of Sir Horace would be vain; he really did not know what it was. Where would be found daughters reared with the exemplary care bestowed upon the Misses Vivian, most of whom had been trained in Edinburgh (where they also possessed a mansion), a sufficient guarantee of the discipline exercised? Where a man more aptly realizing the old legends of a perfect husband or model father? This was well known. For the sake of her health, Lady Vivian resided in Nice; for the sake of his health, Sir Horace remained in London, yet no one could have continued to adhere to that code observed when her ladyship was present more closely than did Sir Horace. From the eldest to the youngest of them, the Vivian family, and every member thereof, and every connection of every member, together with the particular friends of the connection, were the pink of propriety.

"One can not be too discreet," said Sir Horace, and he really thought so.

Thus one of the prudent actions contingent upon this habitual foresight was the advertising for an extremely refined and lady-like person to take the charge of his daughters when at home or upon their travels.

The result was the engagement of a lady emphatically answering to the description, who pleased Sir Horace extremely from first seeing her. With every desirable grace, an evident wish to please, gentle manners, a slight melancholy which, without being depressing, was fraught with winning sweetness, and an amiableness of disposition that won all their hearts, this was the invaluable companion now added to the establishment.

The lady's references and testimonials, signed by the manager of a leading bank, were perfectly satisfactory, and Mrs. Esther Thompson, widow, entered at once upon her duties.

To the lady's great surprise (and secret sorrow) she learned it was as travelling companion also she had been engaged; but she was so glad to secure this home and very liberal salary offered by Sir Horace, and liked the ladies of his household so well, the half idea of resigning it at once was overruled.

And with courier and two maids in attendance the party left town for Nice.

After they had gone, the great house in the stately square seemed exceedingly lonely, with closed rooms, diminished servants, a general silence, and that deserted aspect such buildings wear when the family is away.

At first Sir Horace did not mind, for he was behindhand with his Quarterlies, and availed himself of the quiet to recover time. A great reader, Sir Horace was yet as particular in his literary choice and as judicious in his critical application as in other things.

Blinds were down to preserve the carpets, the gold and white furniture was incased in holland, the conservatory looked dismal as a jungle—the glints of blue and crimson glass for the first time taking ecclesiastically solemn hue, the guest-chambers echoed with hollow, mocking sounds, and the broad stairs seemed dead with longing for a footstep.

Sir Horace resolved to close the house and stay at his hotel in Dover Street pending the return of his daughters, for it was intolerably dull, and he was averse to intolerable dullness. Quietness he was attached to, but not the other.

Sir Horace gave his servants leave of absence until written for, and allowed them to go that day, intending to run down to Brighton by the six-o'clock train out of London, and there pass the night and following day with an old literary friend who resided in Oriental Place.

But later on the gentleman altered his mind, and decided to go down in the morning instead. Unfortunately the servants had left for home, and Sir Horace was alone, the great house seeming more dull than ever. However, it was not worth going to the hotel for one night, he thought, and having a quantity of loose papers about that needed sorting, arranging, and removing above-stairs, he decided to spend this leisure evening upon the task. Sir Horace always performed this office himself, having an idea nobody else could or would place his papers as he wanted them.

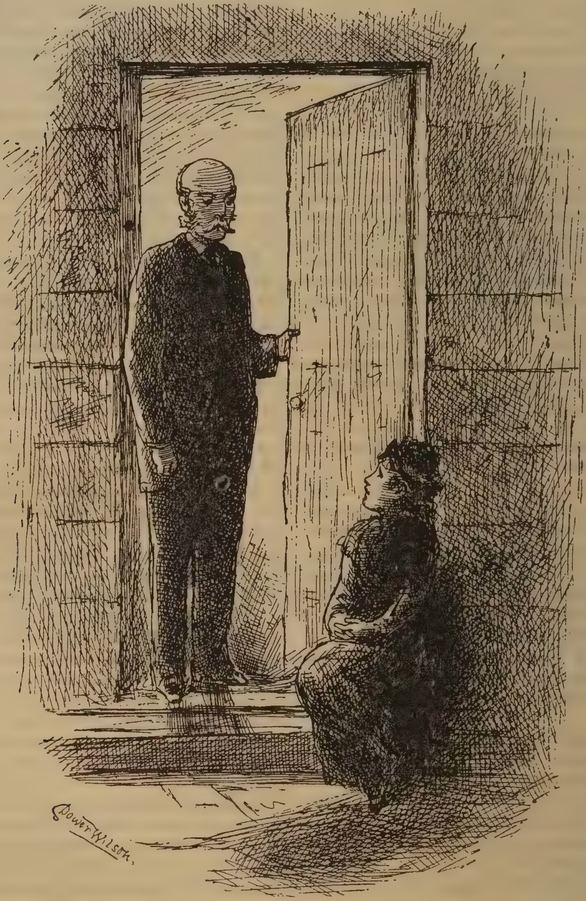
It was a long operation, and tables and chairs were fast disappearing beneath the divided literature.

There was an extract to read back at one place, and an article at another, comparison of notes between journals, and reference to notes and quotations of his own, all of which took up time. These arranging seasons come pleasantly, possess a charm of their own, and the hours slip on when thus engaged without much progress being made. In the midst, on the carpet, lamp in the centre, busts coming out pallid, staring stonily from the dusk corners at their ordinarily grave companion upon his knees, and up to the neck in fugitive learning: a large fire making all as cheerful as solitude under the conditions could be. Requiring odd numbers to make up the sets, Sir Horace left the library for the dining-room. The hall lamp caused a tall, monkish shadow to fall upon the inlaid coloring. This reminded him he had not secured the back offices, and he proceeded upon that necessary mission.

The whole of the back premises were covered over; the spacious yard opened by the tradesmen's entrance to a lane bounded by the square mews; lamps were lighted here after dark, and the police were vigilant. Thus Sir Horace was more than surprised to discover a little girl asleep upon the door-step of the servants' entrance. Never having been placed in so curious a predicament, he stood before the foundling hesitating upon the course to pursue, wondering whatever his friends would think, could they but see him in so embarrassing a position. What to do he really did not know. To summon the police would be to create some scandal, from which he shrank as from the plague; to smuggle the innocent down the lane and hence would, in the event of his being detected, draw some unpleasant suspicion upon himself, and he was so very particular. He never was so unpleasantly placed in all his life, and the shades of a long line of prim and proper Vivians seemed peering upon him in this stupendous dilemma.

To be voluntarily cruel was contrary to his instincts. He felt glad that he was at least a family man, and really understood the decorous treatment of a female child, even in such an awful emergency as this. A clothes-prop was leaning to a wall, and by its grateful aid Sir Horace awakened the gentle sleeper, keeping at a respectable distance. The child awoke upon the instant, as though accustomed to uncertain waking. There was but little light, yet sufficient to convey to the scrupulous baronet there was nothing to be very alarmed at. The child rising, stood respectfully, ready to tend her simple explanation.

"Little girl," said Sir Horace, kindly, "you have gone to bed in a strange place. Will you tell me how you come to be asleep in my yard, if you please?"



"HE STOOD BEFORE THE FOUNDLING HESITATING UPON THE COURSE TO PURSUE."

This, then, was Sir Horace Vivian, and Ella's heart throbbed violently. She had hoped, when stealing up this back way, after the long walk following her escape, that one of the servants of the mansion would tell her if Mrs. Thompson was within; she was of far too heroic a stamp to divulge relationship, or disclose it was her mother she had come to seek; and how eagerly she had trusted that dear parent might be there! She had meant, without distressing her by a description of what had occurred, to say she had accompanied a man to London who promised to see her to Mr. Percival's, intending to remain there until her mother came, and how the man had failed of his promise; and remembering Sir Horace Vivian's name, she had found out the way by asking, and had come for but a glimpse. This was the guileless scheme to save her mother terror and distress, following upon which she would let Mr. George Percival take her back to the farm. But it had all been postponed by her finding the whole place silent and apparently empty. Utterly overcome by this new misfortune—and it was much for this tender one to realize—she had sat down upon the door-step, crying bitterly; then, tired out and wearied beyond measure, she had gone off to sleep in the dim twilight, lulled by the city's hum.

So, then, this was Sir Horace Vivian.

He looked kind and noble. She did not, after the first effect of surprise, feel very afraid of him; indeed, she thought she could love this benign and pleasant-featured gentleman. With a prettiness of manner that won upon him instantly, she accounted for the singularity of her being there.

She had come from the country, had not been certain of the address where her mother lived, had been lost, found her way thither, had knocked, hoping one of the servants would kindly give her a piece of bread and butter, and finding all still and silent, had been overcome by fatigue and hunger, and had sat upon the door-step and gone off to sleep.

Her eyes traversed the majesty of the tall gentleman before her, upward to the kind face she was conciliating and making kinder, and she saw that her story was told to some purpose.

"Just stand inside, and let's have a look in the larder; I dare say we can find you a piece of bread and butter."

She followed him with docility, he fastening up the back offices behind them, with the half-muttered remark, "Whatever we do we shall not go out this way."

In the housekeeper's room he placed the lamp on the table, and transfixed the trespasser with a most magisterial look. She did not quail, and moreover was exceedingly beautiful.

"I can not say you look as abashed as you might do," he said. Whereat she smiled, and with such show of confidence the inflexible baronet thawed with uncommon rapidity.

"It seems to me you are in about as miserable a plight as could well be; I am exceedingly sorry for you. In the first place, let us see what our larder will provide, after which you will be in better spirits for talking over what is to be done, a question, I confess, I don't know how to decide upon, because to allow you to go out for the purpose of knocking at people's doors asking for your mother is absurd. I'm sure I don't know what to advise or how to act."

Meantime the region of provision was discovered—new ground to Sir Horace, equally with the object of his compassion. The refectory was liberally stored, and Ella was soon deep in the mystery of hare-pie, following this up by cheese-cakes.

This ceremony performed to their mutual satisfaction, it became no longer prudent to shirk the serious matter of the child's disposal, and Sir Horace looked reflectively in the beautiful eyes; in all his life he had never seen any thing so beautiful.

He wondered, what if he took her with him and helped the search in person? Not to be thought of. Suppose it was to leak out, what construction would people put upon it? What if he obtained for her a nice quiet room, in some nice quiet house, kept by some nice quiet couple? That class of person always knows some one who is acquainted with somebody else who is connected with whomever one would most keep any thing from. Negatived accordingly. Suppose they did try the back way, and eloped *via* the mews? Always somebody prying about; looks bad; summary of the very vulgar; most shocking fate that can befall one. Declined in consequence. Poor Ella! Did she but know all the commotion her small life had caused in one quarter and another, she must inevitably shrink into the earth, abashed.

Something else weighed with Sir Horace. There was an air about this child indicative of gentle birth and delicate rearing, and the idea of expelling her was hurtful to his finer feelings. To cast her adrift upon the great city seemed barbarous. He felt for this little friendless one, and, as representing a knightly race, would serve her in this peril-time, and *per fas et nefas* make her at all events happy and at rest for the time being.

"You shall not turn out to-night. There are twenty unoccupied rooms in this house, and it is odd if you can not have one of them. I don't think" (musing) "there would be any impropriety in it. I don't quite like the idea of it, but I see no other course."

She looked so innocent and unconscious of impropriety herself, he felt half annoyed with himself at the thought.

Inviting her to accompany him to the library, chivalrous Sir Horace proceeded thither, closely followed by his fragile companion.

She picked her way daintily in and out the ancient tomes, and looked down upon the litter with a respect that pleased him vastly.

"I dare say you never saw so many books and papers before, my child?"

"I think poor papa had quite as many."

"Oh, ho!" thought Sir Horace; "the daughter of a *littérateur*. I like her all the better for that."

He placed a hassock by the fire, and enthroned thereon with a volume of prints the child looked very much at home. He liked her being there; the place seemed to have lost its dullness; she lent happier furnishing to his room. It was so long since any of his were little, it was like a revival of paled pleasure, and his eyes often wandered over to the fire. He had not expected a companion for his lonely evening, still less one of this innocent degree.

Presently she laid down her volume and went over to him.

"Can I not help you?" Asked quietly, looking down upon him still kneeling; and it was with considerable surprise he found her drop upon hands and knees and look up into his grave face for answer. He liked her artlessness, her winsomeness; he was pleased with her readiness to be of use; and very soon Ella was busiest of the two, sorting, piling, numbering, dating, with a quickness and tact surprising as it was pleasing.

And after it was all over Sir Horace recurred to the vexing difficulty of where to place her. He scarcely liked to take liberties with his daughters' apartments, over which they were exceedingly particular, while the guest-chambers would be very cold and cheerless; but saying, "Carry this light for me, and come up stairs, that we may see if a nest is to be found for you until to-morrow," he stalked up the broad flight, mailed armor of his ancestors ominous upon its stages. Past grim chambers, splendid and silent, past lofty windows, past diverging corridors, past the more humble section of sleeping-rooms; then waste wardrobe rooms, a retreat for a few choice flowers, a chamber where odd pictures and objects of art displaced and out of date were stowed away, and through this a small room, of which Sir Horace alone possessed the right of entrance, a diminutive *sanctum sanctorum*, atelier and study in one; a miniature boudoir where its owner sat at his easel, wrote at his desk, or slept on his couch at will, and always undisturbed—a great boon. Whenever it was known papa was closeted in his compact little retreat, nobody ventured an intrusion. He was particular as to privacy at such seasons, and upon his retiring from their world for a little quiet thought alone, his family respected the whim and left him in glorious solitude. And in this fanciful little anteroom he proposed housing his charge with other articles of virtu.

"Well, will it do?" (she was looking around admiringly). "But a doll's house, yet large enough to cradle lost fairies like yourself."

Blushingly she thanked him with a warmth that made him feel quite young again. She was a little too big to lift to a kiss, but he came down to her rosy beauty.

"Now mind, you are not to sit up all night looking at these pretty things, and don't go to sleep and burn the house down."

She looked up in his face timidly, yet with sweet show of confidence.

"I would rather come down stairs where you are, and sleep upon the rug before the fire."

"Oh, that's it, is it? But you would not wish me to sit up all night to keep the fire in?"

"I thought, perhaps, you might be sitting up late arranging your papers." The tone of voice betrayed her sorrow for the unintentional selfishness.

He noticed it, and said, kindly, "So I shall, my child; and if you would rather be down stairs, you may do so." Certainly she could nestle with his dog afront the fire.

They went down stairs again after that. It was singular, but the house no longer seemed the lonesome place it was before. He was as cheerful as when his own dear little girls had made all its corners musical.

She was very tired, and it was not long before she was sleeping, head pillowed upon his dog, face turned to the flickering light, ears still catching at the crackling log he had placed on the fire to please her.

The reader will courteously observe there is nothing of the romantic about this episode: a pretty child asleep in the library of one of the most particular of gentlemen, whose five grown-up daughters ought at the outset to preserve him from any suspicion of acting with indiscretion in the matter of thus giving shelter to the homeless; but when to this we add the hedging in of a reputation by a body-guard of thirteen decorous aunts, Sir Horace Vivian's character would seem to be pretty safe.

In addition to which, Sir Horace was so applied to literary pursuits, he was not exposed, as are many of his peers, to the assailments of a gay and thoughtless age. Even in society his circles of acquaintance were grave, sedate, and intellectual, being confined to men who had written, or ought to have written, and those who were going to write, while his mixing with the opposite sex was simply among the *bas bleus.*

Now by his acute instincts of propriety being susceptible to the least hint of the irregular, upon reviewing his conduct, so far from feeling quite satisfied therewith, Sir Horace was distinctly ill at ease, even under the shadowing protection of a strong-minded wife, five grown-up daughters, and thirteen scrupulously exact aunts. The circumstance, as it had come about, was both probable and natural; but should any human being get scent of it, there was but little doubt that it would be construed into something both improbable and unnatural; and the Vivian knees knocked one against the other with apprehension as he thought of the dilemma, did any of his people happen to turn up; and we all know the line of rail mischance runs on.

But the supreme antidote to these unpleasant feelings was afforded by their innocent cause, whose grace and beauty pleaded with stronger eloquence than any self-reasoning. He stood over her, looking down upon the still piece of wax, watching the light flushing the roses and gleaming upon the hair strewn over the glossy blackness of his great dog, and he thought how beautiful she looked. He traced the drooping lashes and delicately pencilled brows, and the general refinement every where apparent, and wondered who was her father, her mother, that this should be. To his keen and searching gaze there was displayed more than the mere beauty; he read intellect and understanding; possibly genius might be slumbering there, and he was more than ever interested in his young charge and in her parentage.

Sir Horace returned to the progress of arranging his journals, and for some time was diligently engaged upon the occupation, looking up at intervals with a glance at his dainty volume before the fire. Suddenly he paused, stood perfectly still, and listened; his quick ear had caught the sound of a vehicle in the square; no such unusual occurrence that it should set his heart fluttering thus, but upon this evening his nerves seemed all unstrung. He walked a step toward the window and heard a second vehicle, a third, and at a stride stood behind the curtains, then peered through the hinging crevice of the shutter. The first carriage was close, and the terrible vision met his alarmed gaze of the angular form of Aunt Penelope, where, full in the moonlight, she leaned out of the carriage window, directing the driver to the house. The other vehicles were in the rear of the first, and, with agonized confusion, Sir Horace exclaimed:

"Good patience, my aunts! All of them! What on earth is to be done?"

He knew it was all of them, because one never visited unless in company with the other twelve. It was a consolidated body, no single member of which considered it proper to go about this wicked world unattended by as many sisters as had been providentially provided for the protection of each. And Sir Horace felt his heart sink, for a more disastrous calamity could not have happened.

"Whatever can have brought them here tonight of all nights? How excessively awkward, to be sure! I feel so embarrassed I scarcely like to receive them. But then they will hammer at the door until I open it, and thus create a public disturbance and effect an entrance after all. Was ever any one so unfortunately situated? If they discover her, it will never be forgotten, and goodness knows what may be made of it! It will cling to me forever, and after all these years of careful conduct will cast a blot upon the spotlessness of our escutcheon. Bother the woman!"

The somewhat irreverent exclamation being caused by a glimpse of the leader of this corps of Amazons descending from her chariot, and turning to assist others of her band to alight.

Farcical as the *contre-temps* may appear, to Sir Horace it was a matter of serious moment, and he retreated before the toe of his third aunt, while the two safely alighted formed in line ready for the attack. He took a brief, breathless view of the situation, and decided upon the course to follow instantly. His charge must be concealed.

While there came a tremendous knocking and ringing at the door, Sir Horace lifted the child, and with every care bore her in his arms up the broad steps to that small retreat before mentioned. Quickly as was consistent with comfort, he settled her upon the couch, covered her with warm clothing, lighted the fire in the bijou grate, and left her, locking the door and taking the key, and for double safety that of the larger room by which access was gained to the tiny chamber.

Then he proceeded to admit the bevy.

"How do, nephew? Looking well, I declare. We are very pleased to see you, I am sure; but dreadfully sorry to be so late. Breakdown on one of the lines—gave us a shocking fright. If we hadn't all been together to keep each other up, I don't know how we should have got through it. And how's Marion? Not gone to bed?"

"The girls are on the Continent," said Sir Horace, with as much composure as he could call to his aid, wishing the aunts there also.

"Good gracious! You don't say so! And no sheets aired, I'll be bound!"

"I'm afraid not, aunt." The escutcheoned and inhospitable sinner hoped they would go back again to those exciting tracks where breakdowns are local and probable.

"Well, we'll soon settle that. Come in, girls. It's fortunate we came; no idea you were alone."

"Excuse my frankness, aunt, but—the servants have gone home. I intend shutting the place up while Marion is away."

"Nonsense! Do nothing of the kind. Horrid custom; makes the rooms smell musty. Just take my bonnet, Horace, and the reticule; you'll be careful with it, please?"

This interchange of parley was upon the threshold while the force was marshalling, to the dismay of the startled drivers. Aware by old experience the great question of settlement with these men would devolve upon himself, Sir Horace ushered them into the housekeeper's room, and there transacted the delicate business with as little noise as possible; it was a class of person of whom Sir Horace stood in particular dread. When he came forth, not an aunt was to be seen. Closing the door upon their charioteers, he went in pursuit, expecting, as he found to be the case, straggling expeditions in various directions. Miss Penelope, the eldest, he caught trying the door of that antechamber he had taken the precaution to secure.

"Horace, I smell fire; the door is locked; I am convinced something is amiss."

"Nothing is amiss, my dear aunt. I am obliged to have a fire now and then in my little studio, or my treasures would suffer."

"I don't think a married gentleman has any business to have treasures locked away in his studio; but you were always of that reserved and mysterious order of mind, nephew. For my part, I excessively dislike any thing being kept from family inspection. Wasn't it the lamented Lord Bacon who said, 'Secrecy is corruption?'"

"I do not recall the quotation, but very likely. Where are Aunt Hebe and the rest?"

Voices of the party were heard in the distance; presently they came up with the leader.

"Good gracious, Penelope, the house is deserted; but we found down stairs it is not so long since; for remains of a supper, with *two* chairs still up to the table, may be seen in the housekeeper's room."

"Confound those chairs!" thought Sir Horace.

"This is very serious," murmured Aunt Penelope, gravely, and with suspicious meaning.

"Collect yourself, my dear aunt, I will explain. Marion with her daughters started for Italy, three of our people gone with them, I gave the others a holiday as the most convenient time. Quite by surprise I had a visitor this evening—I did not trouble to remove the fare to the dining-room, being rather an amateur in the part of Drogan; it was pardoned, and we contented ourselves as you have observed."

"I wish we had come a little earlier, to have seen this interesting friend; but I can not quite make my mind easy about this fire in the studio."

"We have been in my little sanctum—"

"And in the library too, I imagine, from the litter. Extravagant, Horace, two fires going at once for one person."

"Two persons, aunt," corrected her nephew, waxing irritable under the cross-questioning.

"Yes, two persons, and this other we ought to know something more about; don't you think so, girls? Remember, it is in dear Marion's absence."

They withdrew upon one side and conferred in a low tone. It may be explained here that the papa of these interesting girls, a classical scholar of marked prejudices, had wedded a lady classical as himself—a veritable Minerva, and it was the fancy of this cultured pair to designate the issue of the union classically; hence the creation of this band of goddesses. They were now left with one common fortune, and that a comfortable one, among them; they were all single ladies, but husbanded this fortune by periodically visiting relations and connections, dividing the entire year upon this colonization and peregrination, moving about in a body, to the intense delight of the people favored, and the awe-struck wonderment of the several railway companies.

It was a bonded vestal sisterhood: mutual interests making the union compact. Penelope, the eldest, being tacitly acknowledged leader, upon her Amazonian shoulders devolved the execution if not the conception of their travels into far countries. It was her perfection of genius which first instituted their lengthened visits, by which so large a disbursement was annually saved. The honor of their visit fell without much favoritism upon the round. If told they were not wanted, or that it was not convenient, they stopped the longer, in case they did not get in next time; their consolidated body gave them strength, and, once located, there was no dislodging them; they were not to be excluded, nor curtailed, nor demolished. Men of their connection called them the Eleventh Plague, and very much patronized the Club during the visitation. No one bore them in more cordial dislike than did Lady Vivian, whose refined sense of delicacy was terribly shocked by the troop. Upon one occasion, returning from her drive in the Park, she found her house not only taken possession of in her absence, but they were brooding in council over the whole contents of her wardrobe spread out before the tribe.

One quality these ladies possessed which annoyed their friends beyond all their other virtues put together. This was the scenting out of scandals, at the delicate discovery of which they were without rivals in this or any other land. They entertained a theory, not that there was a skeleton in every cupboard, but that there was something wrong going on in every house, which it was their duty to expose. They were a self-appointed court sitting upon the conduct in that traditional castle the Englishman—until their advent—fondly believed his house to be.

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CHAPTER XI.

A TESTIMONIAL IS PROPOSED.

Froggypond Hall stood at end of a chase full five minutes' walk from the road. It derived its descriptive title from the legions of frogs that all night long croaked with a vigor mildly resembling the din of a battle. The mistress of Froggypond was proud of her frogs, and would on no account have had one insnared. Any visitor objecting to her frogs was requested curtly to withdraw from Froggypond. It is not clear whether the old lady imagined the spirits of her long line of ancestors had passed into these frogs, but it is tolerably certain she considered the frog an ancient and aristocratic emblem. A frog couchant was the crest, a frog in stone squatted upon the family vault, frog salt-cellars in massive silver weighted the board. The old lady had but one surviving relative—her grandson Elmore, the heir to Froggypond. She had made that gentleman one gift in his life, a scarf pin; it bore upon its apex a huge gold frog. The beast was the sign-manual of the house. Mrs. Elsynge envied nobody their rooks or their deer so long as her frogs were alive and croaking.

The pond was at the rear; it was an awful place. At least three of their literary friends had taken it for the scene of horrifying events. Around it grew weeping trees—all the trees that ever wept, it seemed: willow, poplar, ash, elm, birch, holly, lime, beech, cherry, and laburnum—a dense plantation encircling its sluggish, sullen depth. It was grown over with noisome weed, it was guarded by weird reeds, it was the haunt of innumerable horrors, it was the great preserve of the frogs of Froggypond.

Did one of the orchestral band find its way into the house, it was raised tenderly by the mistress (because her servants were afraid of them), and, leaning upon her stick, she would hobble down to her pool (uncommonly like a gentlewoman witch of olden times), and restore it to its fellows with extravagant care.

Sometimes a dog would set up an agreeable howling in the dead of night, naturally to drown the monotonous croaking from the pond. The old lady would invariably arise upon these occasions and proceed to the scene of disputation; she would not have permitted Cerberus himself to bark her frogs to silence, neither could that canine notable have done so.

"*Qu'en disent les grenouilles?*" was in 1791 the popular court phrase at Versailles; and truly might it have been the pass-word at the old Hall. The domestics stood in as great awe of the amphibious tribe as did those Lycian shepherds who, Ovid tells us, were changed into frogs for mocking Latona, or, as Milton's sonnet hath it:

> "As when those hinds that were transform'd to frogs
> Rail'd at Latona's twin-born progeny."

But the shepherds, or, as some say, peasants, weeding a marsh in Caria, had insulted the tribe, and, according to classic precedent, but met with their just desert; the servants at Froggypond, on the contrary, paid court timorously to their mistress's favorites.

The county, aware of Mrs. Elsynge's penchant for this department in amphibiology, gave her a wide berth, and, with the exception of two or three old families equally peculiar with their hobbies and idiosyncrasies, did not visit. The mistress, who was strong-minded and obstinate, did not go into mourning on this account; on the contrary, she expressed herself gratified, since their carriages would not disturb her frogs. Nevertheless, the estate and lands were considerable, and her grandson was much looked up to.

It was studiously kept from this gentleman, yet somehow came to his knowledge, that Seaborough and Sleperton were united upon the idea of making him a testimonial.

Why, he could not imagine; and he heartily wished they had honored somebody else by the choice. True, as church-warden, guardian, magistrate, and mayor, he had served the town to the best of his ability; but then he was also the largest land-owner for miles round, hence very able to return any mark of esteem the town might confer.

Through the officious informant who is ever at hand to divulge any thing particularly kept a secret, Mr. Elsynge was acquainted what preliminaries had taken place; private and confidential meetings having been organized for the arrangements whereby the scheme of municipal gratitude might be carried out with decorum and *éclat*.

The first meeting had been convened to assemble at eight o'clock in the evening of a Monday, the conference place being the coffee-room at the *Lindon Arms*. Mrs. Tapper was equal to the occasion. The superb brocade, not had out since Tapper's death, was worn with buxom effect; the coffee-room, which had not been swept or garnished within memory of man, had undergone a regular turning out. If there is an interior more faded of aspect and stale of odor than another, it is a coffee-room, but this of the *Arms* was made to present a most inviting appearance, and therein assembled a goodly number of influential and representative ones for the discussion of the matter.

Very elaborate had been the propositions and suggestions; and to this gentleman, who hated the idea of a testimonial with emphatic contempt, very elaborate indeed appeared the nonsense.

A week afterward he heard that a second meeting had been convened, at which had been passed these important resolutions: First, that the public be invited to respond liberally to the universal sense of the civil, moral, and intellectual worth of Elmore Elsynge, Esquire; a subscription fund to be opened at the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins, Mr. Simcox, Curator of the Museum, being appointed treasurer. Secondly, that the clergy and gentry be personally waited upon by one of the committee in furtherance of their views. Thirdly, that the testimonial take the form of a piece of plate (Mr. Elsynge being destitute of that useful addendum to the fittings of a gentleman's house! His rooms were lumbered with it already, and there were the frog-graven tankards and goblets, tea-pots and cream ewers to come). The third resolution seemed to have been carried after some disputation, Smelt, the fish-monger, having been of opinion the new memorial of their esteem should take the form of a stained glass window in their church, which could be fixed opposite his (Smelt's) pew (where there was an ugly blank); but then somebody had the good sense to remark that in that case Smelt himself would be the chief gainer, especially since Mr. Elsynge attended at another church; at which Mr. Smelt, the fish-monger, left the coffee-room in high dudgeon, and had been heard to remark to Mrs. Tapper at the bar that the arrangements were very unsatisfactory for the general public. After which arose one Uriah Sticky, grocer, who was a Dissenter, likewise a teetotaler, and who proposed, with mild adjectives, something in the way of a drinking fountain or a pump. He was overruled by the ex-mayor, who was any thing but a temperance advocate, in fact, was partial to the vintages. This gentleman testified with pride to the fact that Elmore Elsynge, Esquire, detested humbug, and while always foremost for sobriety, was the best customer upon the books of their friend Bacchus Bin who was present; at which Mr. Sticky withdrew, much hurt. He was a conscientious reformer, and earnestly wished to see Seaborough and Sleperton depart from the error of their ways. He was affronted by the use of that word "humbug," and went home to Mrs. Sticky, and over an order for lemonade and ginger-beer then being dispatched, said, with acute sorrow, that he feared the testimonial was being altogether mismanaged. Upon the retirement of their dear friend Sticky it was further discussed. Bacchus Bin, the wine-merchant, said he was not going to subscribe to any thing in the drinking-fountain way; the English as a race were deteriorating, and he attributed it to the increase in water-drinking, which he thought impoverished the blood. The respected gentleman (who ranks next in importance in the neighborhood to Cask and Cooper, the well-known brewers) was listened to with deep attention and many an appreciative glance upward at a framed announcement in silver letters that CASK AND COOPER'S ENTIRE and FINE OLD ALES might there be obtained. "I have to propose, gentlemen, that this testimonial to our highly respected landlord, who, we trust, may some day represent this important and enlightened borough in Parliament; that this testimonial which we are about unanimously to present to our much-esteemed landlord, who we hope yet to see represent our town and borough; that this testimonial which it is the general wish of the residents of this enlightened borough—" Here some bold individual cried, "Hear! hear!" which put Mr. Bin out, and he sat down amid much esteem and respect, without, however, having advanced the testimonial very much farther. Mr. Vault, the stone-mason, here trespassed, as he said, upon the time of the meeting; but with deference to the better opinion of those with more experienced judgment, he ventured courteously to submit a proposition for something in the way of an OBELISK.

This proposal was not received favorably, and the gentleman, with much solemnity, descended to his seat again. Another unfortunate being begged to suggest the foundation of almshouses as a memorial to the goodness of their friend, whose virtues they had assembled to celebrate. In spite of speaking very nicely, and a most polite bow at commencement and close of his remarks, the gentleman was extinguished. It was known he had a group of aged relatives in the background, and the committee did not see it. After that, Mr. Buckram, the draper, rose with very business-like demeanor, and he would not detain the meeting by any roundabout statement of his views upon this important, nay, he might say, momentous, occasion. He knew that the time of the committee was taken up by much that was irrelevant, and would not introduce foreign matter in his brief remarks at that time. He had felt surprised at the manner in which the subject had been treated; he might say, indeed, it had been a discussion upon trivialities, and he begged to amend the motion of submitting, in the most concise manner possible, the proposition to be made. People here appearing bewildered, and not quite certain himself where he was, the generally esteemed speaker made a butt at his proposal, and suggested a yard of very good silk or satin illuminated by hand, etc. This was overruled in consequence of its not being deemed suitable when put to the vote, the truth of the negative sentiment being that but one person in all Seaborough or Sleperton was skilled at illuminating, that person being the daughter of Benjamin Buckram, Draper and Hosier. After that, Mr. Easel, the artist, a great authority in matters of taste, submitted that an oil-painting, full length, in robes of office—which, said the authority in matters of taste, would not only be a work of art, but would be historically valuable and an heir-loom—should be presented, he thought, to that exemplary lady, Mrs. Elsynge, of Froggypond. At this point Mr. Panel, the carriage-builder, had lifted his hand apologetically, and wished to pass a remark. Mr. Panel was a man of substance, and the remark was listened to kindly.

"Mr. Chairman and Fellow-townsmen," commenced the courtly Panel, "we assemble to-day upon an occasion that is, to my mind, of more than ordinary interest. For a long period we have been silent but not unmoved witnesses of the virtues of a descendant of one of the oldest and most honored families in this neighborhood. The time has come to make this appreciation public: in the face of the world we would bear evidence to the official and private service rendered to this town and borough by the illustrious gentleman we would signalize; and I submit, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, that the testimonial take the form of a new and handsome carriage." The lumbering old affair then in use by the family had been made by Panel's father, and the proposal was attentively considered. It was eventually thrown out, upon the representation being made that Mr. Elsynge seldom or never used the family coach, he being, as was well known, an enthusiastic lover of equine exercise, and possessing, moreover, faultless animals in the stables. He was a great hunter, and they were proud of it—it was a hunting country. Mr. Silverside arose; Mr. Silverside represented the wealth of the community of shop-keepers. Mr. Silverside said he had reserved his remarks until the last, reserved them with impatience, for he had listened to a great deal of nonsense, and most of the sentiments had been all fudge. Those who had distinguished themselves became surly, but with knit brows and crisp-looking silver curls sloping upward from an intellectual brow, the much-respected fellow-townsman pursued the tenor of his way. It was this way: he had lived all his life in their beautiful town, had seen two generations, had assisted in the presentation of testimonials before, and disliked circumlocution. All things considered, he thought, and he thought the committee would think as he thought, in thinking which he thought he was thinking with the committee. Here the worthy Silverside, whom nature had not engraved as an orator, shut his eyes the better to see his argument, and the gentlemen who had already spoken and been called to account applauded with their toes under the table, the jeweller going on to say he thought, and he thought the committee would think as he thought in thinking, A Piece of Plate, commemorative of the trophies of the chase, would be as acceptable as any thing they could confer; and there being no dissentient voice, this was unanimously carried, and the worthy proposer intrusted with the commission of its execution, in as tasteful a design and as rich a quality as the subscribed amount would admit of.

Mr. Elsynge's informant entered very fully into this account, and the possessor of the many virtues would gladly have handed over a hundred pounds to the local charities to escape from the coming honor. It was eminently repulsive being under an obligation to nobody knows whom for a something he did not deserve, and would rather have been without, and yet was supposed to know nothing about. To feel every eye was contemplating his horsemanship while calculation was going on with hand in pocket concerning the cost of self and steed in silver! To feel unable to speak his mind to the traders or the servants, lest he should hurt the susceptibility of one or other contributing to that precious testimonial!

It was very unpleasant, and Mr. Elsynge did not like it at all, and rode over to commune with the mistress of Froggypond Hall.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE TRIUMPH OF SEASONS."

December: Lady Darrell's residence in Brighton: the apartment it was her pleasure to occupy when alone: evening.

A chamber characteristic as usual, presenting an unconventional arrangement of color, and grouping for effect.

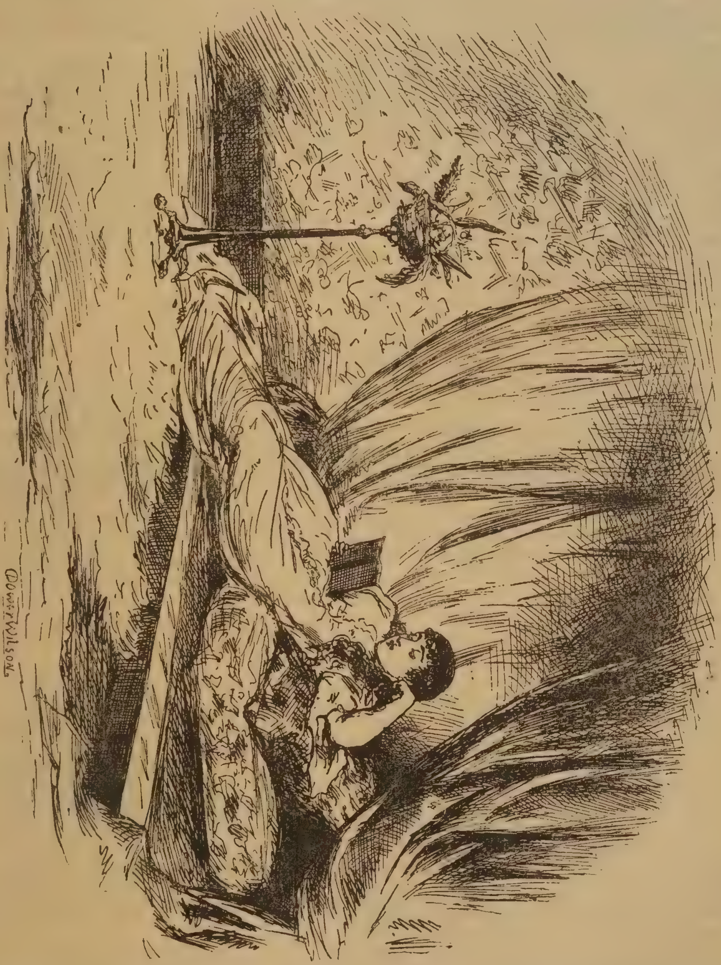
The first impression left upon the mind was similar to that caused by some dense forest, some nook o'erarched and embowered by solid masses of dusky leaf, save that here no relief of gorgeous browns, of tawny fern, of auburn boughs, was admitted: the wonders here of hue and tone came of the cunning blending of this forest color in its gradation of changing shades.

The ceiling was picked out in a tracery of delicate leaves, between which, at intervals, the blue or white afforded contrast as in the woods. The walls were trellised with tropical creepers of rich and lustrous leaf, but no blossom. The floor was laid, apparently, with thick layers of moss. So much for the frame-work. The singularity of the interior depended upon the appointments, of a magnificent character and very original. From a ring of gold central of the ceiling there fell thick curtains of velvet of an olive hue, the ends of these were confined by gold pegs at either corner of the room, and formed a canopied tent of Arab resemblance, lined within with silk. From the centre of this elegant tent descended by a chain of gold a ruby-colored lamp; upon the floor over luxurious cushions were stretched dazzling white rugs, and hereon my lady reclined at her ease, reading. A slender tapering gilt pedestal bore a rustic basket of vivid ferns; also near to her, beneath the canopy, was an elegant jardinière graceful with drooping palms. The spacious apartment being square, there would naturally from arrangement of the curtains be four semi-oval spaces upon the mossy carpet. These had been fitted with tropical plants in a style of as admirable disorder as might have been presented in their original fastnesses; a skilled artist of the Gardens of Acclimatization, in the Bois de Boulogne, had been intrusted with the delicate commission of pleasing her ladyship in the tropical decorating of these glens. He did not please her—no one ever did—but she made fain to be content because anxious to take possession; nevertheless, that artist had produced four conceptions of chaste and beautiful design, representing the seasons in African valleys with their marvellous gradation of growth and color. Midst of the luxuriance of verdure upon each side was a statue allegorical of the season: suspended above by chains of gold were ruby lamps, one over each retreat; birds flitted through interlaced leaves, fountains curved their spiral spray, the odorous breath of exquisite perfume filled all the chamber; and before each of the retreats was spread a magnificent tiger-skin. Lady Helen would have been unable to exist without her jungle trophies.

No furniture—four-legged monstrosities as she considered such; no books, save one she was reading with fascinated attention; no pictures, save those of nature herself; no intrusion by domestics or others. The seclusion here was inviolate; here alone she retired to be free and solitary, as though in reality amidst the forest ways beneath the sumptuous awning of some barbaric chief.

Lord Darrell, her ladyship's father, once made a mistake with the doors in this new house, and glided upon this strange world, but with a scared look he glided out again, and had never ventured there since. And no other step had profaned its solitude. It was absolutely the bijou dominion of its haughty sovereign.

A warm and luxurious temperature was promoted by pipes concealed behind the rock-work and plants; thus, although December, it was the climate here of some sunny land. Lady Helen was robed simply, yet in character with the retirement of this spot. An evening dressing-gown of white cashmere lined with ruby-colored silk, her long hair unconfined straying over this and the snowy rugs upon which she reclined. Her hand trifled with a small volume bound in a costly fashion, the covers chastely embellished with gold upon a blue ground of exquisite shading. Not at the outside of this volume did her ladyship gaze; it was not this caused the proudly curved lips to smile. The volume was the Minister's latest work, and it happened to hit her ladyship's taste.



"NOT AT THE OUTSIDE OF THIS VOLUME DID HER LADYSHIP GAZE; IT WAS NOT THIS CAUSED THE PROUDLY CURVED LIPS TO SMILE."

The time given to its perusal was the pleasantest she had passed for many a day. The book fell from Lady Helen's hand, and lay with its sumptuous binding upon the snowy rug.

"He closes with coldness and sarcasm," she murmured, sadly, "as though the woman with her children spared to her can afford to think of old attachment or present emotion. This man does not know human nature, or the womanly side of it."

Resting her head upon her hand, for a wonder this haughty empress seemed strangely human for a while; she was musing upon this writer of whom the world was talking.

"I can not understand it," said her ladyship, slowly. "The man and his eloquence in the pulpit move me beyond control; but I am unable to reconcile these side gleams of bitterness, half rebellious, almost repining, and evidencing either keen regret or a horrible longing. There is some mystery; and, contrary to my inclinations, I am interested. I must admit to myself that I like the man. It is excessively disagreeable going with the rabble who follow him, but I like the man. I wish I knew his history. My wishes have hitherto been law. Why does he not do as others do, and seek my friendship? The friendship I have never yielded to another I would give to him; and surely I am worthy of his confidence! That which he may never have told to another he perhaps would tell to me. I do not know why, but the suspicion has flitted across my mind that he has been married—is separated from his wife, possibly from his children. Oh, if this be the case, how yearningly could I listen, and confess! What joy and relief to disclose all, and at last meet with a little sympathy! I, who have never known it, never experienced woman's great source of solace—the power to confide to some compassionate friend the full sorrow of an overburdened heart! I am told he does not visit the wealthy, but devotes his entire time to the poor, the troubled, the sin-stricken, and crime-stained; then why does he not call here? There would be nothing ceremonious about such a visit—we are not strangers—and by language of the eye are well known to one another; knit by some great, and, if I err not, by one similar, sorrow."

Her favorite and privileged maid entered.

"Mr. Garland, my lady, presents his compliments, and if you are at leisure—"

"Show Mr. Garland here at once."

"My lady?—" This was so startling an innovation, for a visitor to be conducted to this apartment, where the faithful servitors could neither peep nor listen, that my lady's lady resented it with as well-bred an air of remonstrance as she deemed politic. With languid hauteur the lady bestowed one inquiring glance upon the maid; it was sufficient.

Mr. Garland had been conducted by the footman to the state drawing-room. Upon a fawn-colored leather sofa was curled a reddish, fawn-colored individual, who just raised his head with the fox-like scrutiny habitual, and curled up again, motionless, silent, part and parcel of the tawny couch. This was not according to the Minister's large-hearted ideas at all; he disapproved of the wholesale ignoring of the poor old lord, and, walking up, offered him his hand with genuine feeling and that cordially winning air so ingratiating with every one. Lord Darrell took the hand gingerly, and, having taken it, not knowing what to do with the unusual offering, dropped it, and curled closer, with a half-nervous look out of the corners of his eyes through fringes of red lashes. His lordship entertained distaste and want of appreciation for public men. Ministers he did not understand, platform orators he abominated (he had once been cajoled into the chair at the back of an awful orator before a crowded and noisy meeting, and Lord Darrell had never forgotten the peculiar sensations attending that embarrassing evening). Writers, too, he disliked extremely: thus when Mr. Garland uttered his kindly greeting the nobleman merely nodded, turned round, and curled up tighter on the other side. Mr. Garland walked away to another part of the room, and stood before a painting representing an old and stately building surrounded by beautiful scenery.

"A noble building this, my lord. Some historic site?"

"Our place at the Lakes. Beautifully retired. I was born for quietude." He had glided up, and, standing by the wall, blended in with the brown scrolling of the paper.

"I wish you would call upon me," said the Minister, earnestly; "I should like to hear all about this house."

"Would you, really?"

A smile changed the whole of his features. He looked gratefully at this man taking the trouble to be polite to him.

"Believe me, I should be most pleased. Come whenever disposed to enjoy a quiet talk, and without any ceremony."

With a grateful expression the old lord glided back to his lair, and became inanimate, just as the domestic whose province it was to announce the Darrell guests opened the door. The servants made sport of the autumnal peer. He knew it, shrank under it, but passed it over sufferingly, passive and as though serenely unconscious of any and every thing.

"Her ladyship will be pleased to see you, Sir, if you will follow me." And the visitor was transferred to her ladyship's maid, who conducted him to her ladyship's presence.

Mr. Garland was considerably astonished when he entered the tropical fastness. There was luxuriance of flora, a romantic circlet of splendid growth arranged as he had never seen in a building, and the silken canopied tent, which he skirted while he heard the clear musical voice of Lady Helen saying:

"Come round, Mr. Garland. You will think this a barbaric place to receive you in, but I retreat to my little tropical garden to escape from people, and I have but just finished reading your book, which, it seems to me, should be enjoyed in some such privacy. It is kind to call upon me. I know how you are engaged, and appreciate your visit accordingly."

This was a particularly gracious speech for her ladyship, and while the Minister lightly touched her hand, extended without rising, he experienced pleasure at meeting with a more genuine reception than he had anticipated. She waved her hand toward a folding-chair with three gilt supports, and he seated himself. He caught sight of his *Triumph of Seasons*, and of course noticed that it was bound in a style specially luxurious and artistic.

"You have been reading my little book?"

"Yes. And it pleases me in parts. But you are rather bitter between the lines, and you do not know our sex."

"Possibly it is one of the departments of knowledge best unknown. But are you sure?"

"Quite, if you suppose a woman with her children spared to her will not think of them in every instance first."

He inclined his head with gentle assent.

"I have now called to ask sympathy for one of your sex who is in trouble, and passing through great anxiety."

"But what could have made you come to me, of all Brighton, when there are so many sympathetic souls about?"

"Because," he replied, very softly, "I do not know any lady whose sympathy lies more deep than yours; who has suffered more within a lifetime; whose intense compassion would be as surely excited."

"Forgive me," she said, giving him her hand again, as she had not given her hand to any one for many a day, "for my doubt of your knowledge."

He proceeded gravely, and as though feeling very much the burden of his mission.

"I do not know any one to whom I would go as I have come to you, bearing the heart's sorrow of another woman; to ask you to go to her and offer the comfort more acceptable when tendered sincerely by one of her own sex."

"Who is it?" she inquired, faintly. "And what is the source of her trouble?"

"Lady Ellerby, a very young wife—you know them—her husband has been away from Brighton for more than a seemly period. The gossips have been teasing her about it, and she is sadly distressed, and timorous of confiding her sorrow to any, which makes it harder to bear."

"And she admitted this to you?"

"No; I taxed her with it. I discerned the trouble, and wish to help her. I know his lordship, and do not fear; but it is not so easy to impress her with my conviction of his truth and faith, now that the poison is working its course. A woman sooner takes the word of a woman as security for a man's honor than that of one of his own sex. Will you go to her, explain that Lord Ellerby's artist fancies may be idyllic, and express yourself confident of his allegiance?"

"No, Mr. Garland, because I am not confident. I could speak thus assuredly of but one man—but one."

The tone was very pathetic, and her eyes filled with tears.

The Minister was moved; he bowed his head.

"You allude to—"

"To the dead. But now," with an effort, recovering herself, "how can I help this poor child? What do you suggest?"

"Man can not suggest; God will prompt. Go to her pityingly; there will be more consolation in mute sympathy and cheering words than in a studied effort to console."

"I will do as you ask me." She paused, trifling painfully with the fur by her side. "Lady Ellerby is not the only woman who needs sympathy, and can not confide her sorrow to another."

"My whole life's experience teaches me differently; but you, of course, are alluding to—to Lady Lindon?"

"Ay, to that unhappy lady, widowed and childless. Can there be a greater demand for sympathy than hers?"

"Oh yes, very readily. Lady Lindon's whole life is to me an inconceivable riddle, vexing and unsatisfactory; a marked continuance of anguish, a hollow dedication of self and soul to the world, an endless battle with opinion, a tourney of unapproached daring with society, a miserable isolation betwixt gayety and selfishness, a comfortless and uncomforted passage through a world bristling with weapons, a wealthy solitude, an infinite dreariness, a repining forever and forever, while haunted by what might have been, and confronted by what is. Lady Lindon is worthy of a more noble destiny than this; and while supporting such unjust and agonizing theories, Lady Lindon has not the prior claim to heart-felt sympathy. But I am well assured the method you adopt and the forms you accept of disguising remorse and veiling contrition, are but of valueless regard in your more than womanly keenness of judgment."

"Would you have me sit and brood, nun-like, in some close cell, on barren joys, and languish under yearning never to be realized?"

"No, I do not hold with brooding, although God knows we can not help it at times. I would have you seek out the sorrows of others, therein to lose partial memory of your own."

"Mine are too great to be lost sight of in that way; I should but increase their weight and burden."

"I would have you visit the sick; minister to the poor."

"I detest sickness in myself or any one else, in the poor especially; if my relief is to be worked out in such channels, I would rather keep my own sorrows and woes to myself, and leave others to do the same."

He took no notice of her plain candor, and would not, until his scroll of good works was fully unrolled.

"Then I would have you seek humbly and with most utter penitence for some higher hope than spans this little world of ours; aspire to the peace more abiding than earth affords."

"The first step to that peace and the glimpse of that higher hope must be when the treasures of which a heart has been despoiled live in that heart again, live for that heart alone. Can you restore the dead to life, Westley Garland, or the lost to the guilty and suffering? When you can do this, then talk to me as though I were one of the ordinary human women to whom you would carry hope."

"There is One who can do all things," he replied, with a sad and gentle smile; "restore the dead to the loving, the lost to the guilty. But before Mercy works the miracle Pardon must assign the motive; the sacrifice of many tears and the offering of a heart's true penitence will effect all you desire, and the rest you may safely leave in other hands."

Long after the Minister's departure Lady Lindon thought upon his words.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRIBUNAL OF GODDESSES.

The conference was of short duration. Miss Penelope turned curtly to her nephew.

"We are decided. We shall stop, and must rough it. Don't you trouble, Horace; we'll do. Now, girls, to work. Where's the plate-basket, nephew?"

"I'm sure I can't say, aunt."

"Good lawk!" cried Aunt Phyllis, spitefully. "Here's a man don't know where his own plate-basket is! It's a good thing we came as we did to tell him. I always said this was the most extravagant household in England."

"I've a suspicion all is not right," whispered Aunt Penelope to Aunt Minerva, "and if I live, I'll find out what it is. We owe it to Society, dears. Our painful duty lies before us. I am seldom deceived in my presentiments, the true danger signals of life. Mark dear Horace's flushed cheek and absent manner, and his edging near that door. I always had my suspicions about Horace, and one day you will see I am right. Our poor sainted Marion" (Lady Vivian) "would not absent herself without a cause."

"Pulmonary, dear Penelope, the doctors say."

"Fudge!"

"Shall we go down stairs to the library, my dear aunts? You'll excuse the drawing-room—no fire—furniture covered up."

"Don't you trouble, Horace. We'll soon have the covers off."

"Hoity-toity, what's this?" Aunt Diana had picked up a small pocket-handkerchief which the little fugitive had unfortunately dropped upon the stairs. "Well, this is pretty, I must confess! Marked—yes, it is, with *E. T.* in the corner. This does not belong to any of us, you know."

"Give me the thing." Thus the presiding goddess, in a sepulchral voice; and the sister harpies made obeisance.

"Tell you what it is," said Aunt Penelope, in solemn under-tones, "a female is concealed in the house." A shuddering thrill pervaded the closely clustered maidens, and the more sensitive to the unkind breath of calumny held each other by the hand, looking unutterably pensive. Not so the hardened leader, an old officer, who never gave way to sentiment or any thing soft. Looking the group hard in the face, she repeated, "a female!" and from the horrified looks one would have supposed they had never seen a female before. "And it is our bounden duty to discover her. But come, girls, there are seven beds to be aired; we shall not be a-bed by morning. Now, Horace, where's the key of the clothes-press?"

"I rather think Marion took it with her."

"Then I rather think we shall have to force the lock. Don't you trouble, Horace, but trot down to your books."

"I wish I knew where to lay my hand on a fellow who understands dynamite, to dispatch this lot to the other end of London." With which undutiful, disrespectful, and irreverent vent to his inner sensations, Sir Horace then relieved himself outwardly. "There seems to be some dissatisfaction, my dear aunts, at your finding me so very much monarch of all I survey. You'll allow me to say, with all my love for you, that I have not the least objection to continue my independent sovereignty. Your fly-men have not left the square, and I shall be happy to re-engage them for you."

"Just what I expected," remarked Aunt Penelope to aunts Hermione and Vesta. "He wants to get rid of us; but he sha'n't! No, Horace, we've come for a month, and a month we stop, if only in the interests of dear Marion, and though all the guards of St. James's should attempt to eject us. So don't you trouble, Horace, we'll manage, and get things into working order; but no mysteries—we're determined."

"Well said," from Aunt Vesta, the others piping in unison.

Knowing of old experience that remonstrance would be futile, Sir Horace left the goddesses to luxuriate at will, and returned to his task in the library. Occasionally the marching of the force from quarter to quarter caused a rumbling to be heard, and sometimes, when they were disagreeing and all talking at once, the din of the fray floated down to him; but beyond this he was not much annoyed for the time being. At an early hour in the morning they retired; the house was perfectly still, and before the embers of his fire Sir Horace reviewed the situation. He knew sufficient of the battalion to rest assured that they would leave no stone unturned likely to forward their investigation.

He longed to revisit his little charge, to make certain all was well with her. It would be the only time, he feared, when he could go secure from interruption.

Having stocked a basket with provisions and all the good things he could find, Sir Horace extinguished the light, and stole softly up stairs. It was early dawn; a shaft of light fell on the mailed figures guarding the stairs like the appointed sentinels of propriety. Past these it was very dark, and he had to feel quietly for the door knob. Thus doing, his hand encountered something soft and warm; it was a human neck, and it reared. He knew it was Aunt Penelope, who had been listening at the key-hole. The basket grazing her arm, the idea of a burglar and plate-basket evidently took possession of the fair detective, for she fled like the wind, to the great delight of Sir Horace, that persevering gentleman admitting himself without loss of time, and carefully closing the door.

In the second chamber he found the fire burning low, casting flickering shadows on the pretty sleeper, who formed a subject he designed for an early sketch. It was so near the dawn, he made up the fire, settled himself in an easy-chair, and watched her; it was far too fair a picture to disturb. The delicate contour, healthful flush, and youthful happiness of that dream-time made up a study that delighted him, and before he was aware of his weariness he too fell asleep, and slept on till daylight, to be awakened by two lips on his that left the swiftest and lightest of kisses. It was the more pleasant, because it released him from the thralldom of unpleasant dreaming, wherein, arraigned before the thirteen as counsel and judges in a court with closed doors, he had been subjected to cross-examination of a peculiarly offensive kind.

"So, miss," he said, smilingly, "you are awake, then?"

"I've had a lovely sleep," she answered, with charming confidence; "and been dreaming of poor papa."

"And I've been dreaming too," replied he, with a wry face. "A pretty pickle you've got me into! And how to get out of it is more than I can discern. You open your eyes, little one. Frankly, the entire family according to Burke has descended. You don't understand? Come here and I will explain." He lifted her on to his knee and explained. She was delightfully sensible, but caught at the humor rather than the seriousness of the position.

"I can creep down stairs and away if you like."

"Not for any thing. They are all over the place. One on guard at every door, a posse at the bottom of the stairs, and two marching up and down the court-yard."

This was exaggeration, but it served to impress her, and she looked with grave concern into the kind face, while saying:

"I am so sorry! I ought not to have staid."

"I suppose not; but we both acted for the best. Don't go near that window, and tread lightly when moving about, for they've wonderful ears. I must leave you now, for I want to get down to the library before any of them are about."

She gave him her hand prettily, and with a good-by kiss he took leave. All was silent, and he was cautiously locking the outward door and congratulating himself, when he heard Aunt Penelope say at the foot of the stairs:

"Just wait and hear what he has to say in explanation."

At the foot of the stairs the gorgons were drawn up in line.

"Horace," cried Aunt Penelope, transfixing him with her accusing eye, "your bed was not slept in last night."

"Good patience; no more it was!" he exclaimed, for the first time alive to the ugly fact. "I—er, the bed was—er—it was so late, I mean early, I really didn't think it worth while."

"Slept in your chamber of mystery, perhaps." And the speaker looked volumes, to the intense disgust of her sensitive nephew, who, considerably nettled, replied:

"No, my dear aunt. I am like many another monarch; the state couch is only used upon state occasions."

"This levity is shocking!"

"Disgraceful!" murmured Aunt Dido.

The others spake not, but thought the more.

"It may not perhaps be known to you that an old sportsman is satisfied with the veriest shakedown."

"Girls!" Aunt Penelope addressed the assemblage. "When have we ever shrunk from doing our duty? Do we shrink now? If dear Horace has down to be shaken, it is our duty to shake it. Have we come all this way to be consistent and womanly, or have we not? Girls, I wait your decision."

"Suppose we discuss it over coffee?" said Sir Horace.

"We had that hours ago; it's luncheon-time now; there's nothing in the house, and nobody to send to Gunter's."

"Suppose I go and order—"

"No, thank you, we'll go together, and afterward you will take us to the German Reeds, and then we've a little shopping, and as dear Dido longs to see a skating rink, we'll finish there."

Utterly aghast, the unfortunate Sir Horace, passing through it all in imagination, began to feel dreadfully unwell. He was at a loss to conceive which would be the most terrible experience—the luncheon, the entertainment, the business, or the exercise: in the last, by-the-way, he devoutly prayed the party would not attempt to take part.

"I hope you will excuse me—I—really—some writing must be done—pressed for time."

"Nonsense! We don't come to see you every day; give the time up to us now we're here; you'd never be so ungallant as to leave us to ourselves! Fancy us at the crossings, Horace! We want you to take care of us; we might be run over."

"Certainly, my dear aunts," assented Sir Horace, profoundly impressed, but thinking, "No such luck, I'm afraid."

In process of time the aunts-extraordinary were arrayed, and the party set forth. Sir Horace did not quite know whether to put himself at the head or the tail of the detachment; but the ladies settled it, and made sure of their knight-errant by keeping him well in the centre. Altogether it was a spectacle, and thus London seemed to consider, for its worthy citizens stared aghast at Sir Horace, fancying he was the head keeper of St. Luke's. Never having tried the sensation of riding in hansom cabs, his charges decided upon that mode of transit, and an entire rank was chartered forthwith. They journeyed in a line to the German Reeds' entertainment, to the wonderment of passing artisans, who asked one another were they delegates from some reform movement, or almshouses going to a treat. Still in the centre of the procession, Sir Horace felt his position acutely; the illiterate evidently expected he would bow, or in some other way acknowledge the open-mouthed and awe-struck interest, but the gentleman did nothing of the kind; he was thinking of the child alone in that great house, and felt anxious concerning her. Arrived at their destination, the commissionaire also supposed it a charity out for the day; he was abrupt, and careful that his uniform did not fraternize with decayed gentlewomen. They entered: as usual, Sir Horace taking front seats for the assembly. The audience was applauding as they entered, and Aunt Penelope bowed, to the great amusement of some quiet folk near the door. When the tickets were obtained, it was the leader's custom to push forward and leave Sir Horace struggling in the rear. She now led her flock after the manner of geese on a common, with their nephew at the rear; he did not repine, remembering that even the tail of a comet is lustrous. The leader could not find fourteen vacant seats, but she officiously requested a young lady and gentleman to remove; this they did, looking very frightened, and the batch of Amazons took victorious possession. But then it was discovered that Aunt Hermione had left her tippet in one of the cabs, and nothing would do but the entire party must go out again.

The entertainment having commenced, people felt and looked very annoyed, noticing which, Miss Penelope glared upon them so ferociously, and was backed by so formidable a contingent, people made room with the best grace they could summon. Outside it was discovered that the line of cabs had disappeared, and, highly incensed, the party returned to the hall. As they passed, the men all looked down into their hats, a profound sensation was aroused, and Sir Horace wished himself at the bottom of the Red Sea. They had not been sitting seven minutes before Aunt Dido wished for some refreshment. Sir Horace was required to oblige, and he did so, not daring to glance to right or left while making his way out.

Here an idea flashed upon him, a bold one, but which he proceeded to put into execution. He would return home—like the wind—see how his charge was faring, and return as breathlessly; in a few hurried words he would explain events to the child, so that her fear or anxiety would be dispelled.

The cab he hired bore him along by quiet streets and saving corners, and in a very few minutes after leaving the hall he was with Ella, who was not looking any the worse for her imprisonment. The child greeted her friend with gladness, and heard the explanation, thanking him sweetly for his efforts in her behalf; so sweetly he felt more than repaid. He was enabled to give her a few minutes' liberty for a race about the place while restocking the provision basket, and replenishing the coals and wood and picture-books.

He was just re-entering the cab when two policemen appeared, and, checking the driver, inquired of his fare if he answered to the name of Sir Horace Vivian. Sir Horace, with guilty quaking, felt something had happened. He assured the officers, with much politeness, he fully answered to the name, begging to be informed of the motive of their interest.

The officer, who chanced to be one of the obtuse sort, and failing to perceive the gentleman's agitation, blurted out,

"Quantity of ladies gone into hysterics at the circus crossing, calling out for you, Sir."

At first Sir Horace thought of regaining his dwelling and leaving them at the circus crossing, but he well knew it would make the inevitable retribution more terrible.

Whatever had transpired, all was orderly at that point when the troubled gentleman arrived upon the scene. Inquiring of another policeman, he was told that the ladies had been taken to the opposite refreshment-rooms, and, hastening thither, Sir Horace discovered his aggrieved aunts, not lying outstretched, awaiting medical restoratives, as he anticipated, but sitting in a line, sipping cherry-brandy, for which an attendant brought a bill to Sir Horace, total twenty-six shillings. And still Miss Penelope looked with bitter displeasure upon her nephew.

"We will not allude here to your conduct, Horace, for one who could thus leave us to perish must be impervious to any reprimand that affection or morality might devise. It is evident by the success attending the faithful officers in their search for you that, prompted by some inscrutable and mysterious purpose, you returned home; it confirms our previous terrible suspicions, and, Horace, we tremble for you. In the name of your long-suffering family, we conjure you to account for this ominous action!"

"Certainly, my dear aunts. But why all this emotion? Allow me to explain. Aunt Dido wanted something to eat—"

"There is no necessity for putting it in that brutal form, Horace!" cried Aunt Dido, indignantly. "But go on!"

"Aware of the delicacy of my dear aunt's appetite" (it resembled that of an ostrich), "I would not venture upon procuring the confectionery of the neighborhood." Saying which, he removed from his pocket a miscellany of tartlets which the ladies had been busy manufacturing all the morning, and which had been discovered by the uncaged birdie. Much chagrined, the ladies accepted the explanation for the time being, but resolved the affair should receive some other solution.

"If you are now well enough, I propose we go home."

"Oh, certainly; having spoiled our day's enjoyment, you would drag us back without so much as looking at the shops! No, Horace, we have come to do an hour or two's shopping, and we'll do it, if never again. We are all wanting new dresses, and mantles, and bonnets, and may as well have the benefit of your taste as not. Artists, as a rule, are famed for the excellence of their taste, especially those with private studios. So don't you trouble, Horace; we'll do, once set us down at the counter."

Sir Horace was not by any means a penurious person, but he shivered slightly upon hearing this, and felt if he had brought his check-book.

Coerced into a large drapery establishment, Sir Horace stood behind a costume stand hidden from the view of an imposing-looking gentleman, who, with large assurance remarking to an auxiliary, "A rush, I think," courteously inquired Miss Penelope's pleasure. When it was discovered to be a party, the gentleman fell through a trap, or disappeared in some other mysterious form, and was no more seen in that part of the building. The thirteen ladies were patiently entertained by thirteen sleek assistants, who rapidly crowded the counter with fabric in all colors of the rainbow and every quality of the market. His aunts' faces were glowing with pleasure, and Sir Horace thought it a capital chance for a quiet stroll. But no; Aunt Penelope's argus eye was all about her, and with a shrill cry she arrested his retreat.

"Come back, Horace. What, you're off again, then?"

Being a sensitive man, this was peculiarly offensive to Sir Horace before the tittering employés. He felt that he was taken for the Mormon President of Salt Lake, and having an aversion to notoriety, he looked around for the friendly shadow of another costume stand; but none being at hand, he seated himself, and studied the green tracery of the carpet, whereon the goddesses fenced him about.

After a time that counter presented a fair conception of chaos, when each of the ladies had plucked at the inside of every piece, unrolled every roll, turned over every pile, and generally played the deuce with the merchandise, to the consternation of the assistants and marked impatience of their superiors. The utmost resources of the warehouses were taxed to win favor of these singular customers, but no sooner did any of them appear upon the eve of deciding but the others had some objection to offer. Thus no progress was made, and Sir Horace was waxing feverish, when Miss Penelope thought she would look in the window; she might see something there she liked better. With much dignity the leader proceeded to the pavement, followed by Aunt Hebe and Aunt Minerva. Then came Aunt Hermione, Aunt Vesta, and Aunt Circe, none of whom had been quite able to decide. Then aunts Thetis and Leda walked slowly out, talking in a low, deep tone. Aunt Dido trotted in the rear; she had inhaled fumes of cookery from the nether regions, and it revived her reminiscences of the charms of Regent Street and Oxford Street restaurants. Aunts Phyllis and Diana reared in turn and joined the throng, taking Iphigenia with them. Left desolate, Miss Evadne caught at Sir Horace's arm, and clinging thereto with frantic and affrighted perseverance, she was borne from the shop by her devoted nephew.

"Now, Horace," said Miss Penelope, when the grave assembly was met before the elaborately arranged windows, "oblige us by going in and telling 'em we think their goods very dear, and we can do better, and see more variety in the country."

Poor Sir Horace was any thing but enraptured with this commission.

Standing above the savory kitchen of the establishment, Aunt Dido emphatically declared she *must* take something, or sink. The chevalier Sir Horace fervently wished she might sink, or else that her head might tumble off and down to the charger of the cook. A stampede ensued in favor of a restaurant, where his cormorant of an aunt was soon satisfied.

Future operations were then considered; and it being decided the bonnets would most interest them, the party proceeded to a large and imposing millinery establishment. The greater part of two hours was passed here. The natural objection of the ladies to any style too fashionable, any style not fashionable enough, any colors not in exact accord with their individual taste; the fitting on by the entire thirteen when any particular design was approved; the trying of harmonious blending of shades before every mirror in the shop; the unpicking and re-adjusting; taking out of flowers, and taking off of bows, and adding of fresh ones; the altering of plumes and cunning placing of ornaments; the substitution of black for white lace, or *vice versa*, and the removal of narrow for broad, and of plain for corded ribbons—all this occupied much time and exhausted the ingenuity and patience of the combined English and French talent of the fashionable establishment; and great was the wrath thereof when Miss Penelope solemnly asserted their regret, but they really did not see any thing that quite suited them. And they walked out with some indignation that these artistes should have taken up so much of their time, and have shown them nothing superior to what they saw daily in the country. The principal looked highly outraged, was heard to mutter something about a tribe of locusts, and proceeded to an inner room, where she discharged a poor girl, the sole support of bedridden parents.

After such fatigue Aunt Dido wanted something to eat.

"Now, Horace," said Aunt Penelope, when Aunt Dido had again refreshed herself, "you shall take us to see a skating rink, of which we hear such good accounts."

And therewith the devoted gentleman began to feel apprehensive. At that day far less was known of this amusement than at present. There was but one rink, and that particularly select. To this novel resort the party proceeded. Sir Horace became extremely nervous; he had never been upon any thing more slippery than orange peel and oak boards, and the contemplation of supporting thirteen aunts upon cherry-brandy and roller skates imparted a very grave expression to his face. He felt exceedingly uneven before commencing; what he would feel afterward he could not fathom.

Sitting in a line, the ladies were about fastening on their skates when the watchful eyes of Miss Penelope detected a man, some distance off, but with face directed their way; and, blushing very deeply, she ejaculated, "Girls!" Like startled fawns, they were alive to danger upon the instant, and likewise blushed most deeply. Sir Horace was then deputed to go and request the person to turn his head away; so he engaged the obliging and entirely innocent individual in conversation until he imagined his party to be equipped. They were awaiting his coming with impatience, and severely reproved him for neglecting them to gossip with strangers.

"Do you think it safe, dear Horace?" piped Aunt Phyllis, tremulously.

"If you are not nervous, my dear aunts. The main thing is to strike out boldly and with confidence, preserving a balance."

Those who were performing graceful evolutions saw the advent of the new party with dismay, and at once gave them all the area possible.

At last all stood upon the uncertain surface, Sir Horace very near to the edge, six of his dear aunts clinging to him, seven leaning up against him as back to a wall.

The music began to play, and it fired the ladies' enthusiasm. "Push us a little way forward, dear Horace, but for goodness' sake be careful." That gentleman gave the required propulsion, perhaps rather more actively than expected, for away in thirteen directions darted his aunts, up against as many couples. Then Sir Horace sat down to enjoy the sport. The confusion wrought by the goddesses at the skating rink was unique. Their efforts to re-assume the perpendicular only led to fresh disaster; they were in every body's way, and at last were requested to retire from the course. This they strenuously refused to do, and were so defiant that the gentleman present declined to interfere further, and left them to their fate. Thus destitute, the ladies, after some ineffectual attempts, contrived to amalgamate, bearing down, upon the iceberg principle, against all opposing forces. They derived an advantage founded upon their faith, it being simply impossible for a fall to occur while that solidified body remained intact. But their spasmodic appeal to Sir Horace was the strong feature. This he prudently would not notice, pretending to busy himself at the straps of his skates. Very shortly the rink was almost deserted, the advance of that battalion being so formidable that the company resented it by a polite departure. The few who remained endeavored to exercise themselves undisturbed. Among these was an old gentleman of corpulent habit but practiced dexterity, who took manifest pride in the expertness with which he contrived his figures. This individual had the misfortune to be tripped up by the excitable team, which fell upon him in a body. It brought matters to a crisis. The band ceased playing; two servants of the ground requested that Sir Horace would withdraw his party. He in turn requested the myrmidons would deliver the message in person, shrugging his shoulders as to warn them to be careful. Apparently the ladies were quite ready to relinquish the field, and, assisted by the servants, they made for port.

"A pretty trick you've played us, Horace! Dragging us to this abominable place, and leaving us to perish on the frozen deep."

"Then you have not enjoyed the exercise?"

"Enjoyed, indeed! Girls, we will go home."

"I think," put in Aunt Dido, coyly, "we ought to have a little something to eat. I declare I feel quite sinking!"

"You see it has done some good," said Sir Horace to Aunt Penelope, with sardonic cheeriness; "it has improved dear Aunt Dido's appetite."

But this time Miss Penelope overruled her voracious sister; she had set her mind upon going home, and home they went.

After tea Miss Penelope and party made a descent upon the library, where Sir Horace was vainly trying to read.

"Horace, are you quite sure dear Marion took the keys? We can't get at the Berlin wool or any thing else."

"And a very good thing too."

"Horace!" Twenty-six eyelids lifted with ominous effect.

"I mean because you ought to be taking perfect rest."

"Well, have you any new pictures to show us? By-the-bye, we *should* like to see what you're engaged upon now in the studio. Girls, are we united upon this?"

"Certainly!" came with emphatic brevity from all, and Sir Horace began to feel curiously unpleasant. All buzzing at once, it was impossible for him to edge in a word, but when he had that good fortune it was to explain—

"Excuse me, my dear aunts, but I never like any of my pieces to be seen until complete; it spoils the effect, and is apt to excite a prejudice."

"Now don't you trouble, Horace, but come along and open the door, you Blue-beard, you! Our interest is quite piqued."

"I am sorry to disappoint you."

"But we're not going to be disappointed."

"I really can not comply with your request, there are so many things about; get thirteen charming ladies in there, it would make a devil of a mess. I beg your pardon."

"Oh, fie! How much he resembles Pygmalion!" cried Aunt Circe.

"Happy thought!" said Sir Horace to himself; then aloud, "Exactly—that's just it. I've a study there not quite the thing for your kind inspection; in fact, at this moment, *undraped.* I—"

A singularly horrified expression was the result of this announcement; then Miss Penelope vindictively observed:

"I can scarcely describe my sense of shocked surprise, Horace. Fortunately, we telegraphed to your poor dear wife this morning that all was not right in the house, and we asked her instantly to return."

Now it was Sir Horace's turn to be violently and justly indignant.

"I think you meddle in much more than there is any occasion for. If you did so telegraph, it was an unwarrantable liberty."

"There! hear him! only hark at the man!" cried Miss Penelope. "They do so hate to be found out!" confidentially.

Sir Horace was thoroughly aroused. "Will you say plainly what it is you suspect, and are so anxious to scent out? To summon my family in this unceremonious manner I think in execrable taste, and it would have been preferable had you remained in the Midlands."

"Oh yes, of course; you thought you were going to be so nice and quiet all to yourself; but we interfered and marred your pretty plans. To speak plainly, Horace, since you've set us the example, we believe—I think I am right, dear girls, in saying we believe—that some woman is concealed in this house."

Sir Horace laughed lightly, thinking how near and how far from the truth were the suspicions thus candidly expressed.

"I am happy to be able to disabuse your mind of this grave impression. No woman is concealed in the house."

"There! Was ever any thing so unblushingly denied? Girls, my suspicions are not allayed. This attitude is counterfeit. Don't you trouble, Horace; we will discover all."

Too provoked to reply, Sir Horace quitted the room.

He waited up stairs some little time to see if he was followed; but the council being busily brooding over their mischief, he proceeded to act upon an idea that suddenly occurred to him. They *should* see the studio.

His young captive flew to meet him, and he quickly accounted for his long absence, explaining all.

"And I shall soon have my wife and daughters, men-servants and maids, to heighten the perplexity of this precious situation. I don't know which will give me the most trouble, my inquisitive aunts, wondering daughters, or prying domestics. It is imperative for our safety that they should overrun this place. Now in Miss Penelope's chamber, to which I will take you, is a large, old-fashioned chest, of which they think my daughter only possesses the key; one upon my bunch will, however, open it. If you can dispose of your little self among my wife's old cashmeres, stowed away there (and I remember there is a wide strip of wood off the back, so that you will not stand in peril of being suffocated), I will lock you in there, but, of course, release you as soon as possible. We have got into a fix between us, and we must help one another to get out of it."

"I don't mind hiding there at all, only do not forget me."

"If I do, you must give an unearthly squeak in the middle of the night, after which I do not think we shall be much longer troubled with my aunts."

"I feel unhappy to have caused this trouble."

"Suppose I tell you I think you are fully worth the trouble, and that you give me pleasure to counterbalance it; will that set your mind at rest, little girl, and change that pitifully pretty face to smiling confidence?"

Her face grew sunny on the instant, and she put up her mouth to be kissed, as in days when she was the petted darling of a father, tender and kind as this gracious gentleman. The action thanked him as no words would have done.

"Now I will put the place to rights, and make it a little more like your room than mine," she said, lightly removing the traces of her stay, and restoring the retreat to its orthodox artistic disorder. Sir Horace thought his young charge very handy, and he was very much struck by the thoughtfulness displayed. He bestowed in reward a shower of bonbons bought for the purpose, and these she picked up and stored in her pocket. They set out upon the venturesome journey to Miss Penelope's chamber.

Going down stairs afterward, Sir Horace smiled to himself at the daring of hiding away the cause of the disturbance in Miss Penelope's own chamber.

When the gentleman returned to the library the greater part of his book-shelves were bare; classified ranges of volumes were jumbled pell-mell, and a general scene of confusion prevailed—mortifying enough to the literary man wishing to lay his hand on any certain volume in an instant. Four of his aunts stood on his superb writing-table, reaching down splendidly bound works which Miss Minerva was dusting with the hearth broom.

"Will you not come into the drawing-room, aunt?" (to Miss Penelope). "You'll excuse me, but I shall have great trouble to get my books in order again."

"Bless the man! Why, the best of writers have their studies higgledy-piggledy, carpets strewn, chairs loaded, confusion every where. Our poor father, a great scholar and bookworm, Horace, used to say that the study was not a bookseller's shop, and he liked to see it upside down. He said the surest indication of extensive reading and almost illimitable knowledge was never being able to put your hand on any book you wanted, or remember any thing you'd read. This, added our father, stamps the savant, and separates the thinker from the calculator."

After which intelligent and epigrammatic reminiscence, Miss Penelope left the room, returning quickly with triumphant glee.

"Girls, I've the latch-key of the Blue-beard chamber! Found it in the porte-monnaie in dear Horace's walking coat. Now we shall see what we shall see! But let us prepare; oh, let us prepare! For this may be the momentous incident of our lives! Now, follow me!"

"But, my dear aunts," remonstrated Sir Horace, assuming dismay, "you know not what you do! Think for one instant; should not the privacy of my own personal suite be preserved inviolate? Is it kind? What do you think my wife will say?"

"It is in the interest of our poor sainted Marion we undertake this distasteful office. Don't you trouble, Horace; the truth is bound to come out now. On, girls; be brave, and prepare for the worst!" And the force marched on to the scene of discovery.

With the importance of their mission strongly marked upon eager countenances, the great expedition set out. They had been hunting scandal all their days, but this promised to be a chase worthy of their skill.

The door was quickly unlocked, all crowding forward for the first view of the revelation in store.

When they found but an ordinary studio, with its elegant disorder and unconventional art tastes, they were much chagrined; but Miss Penelope restored the confidence of her league without delay. "Wait a while, girls! I see through this! There has been jugglery. But the laws of society are not to be outraged in this barefaced manner! Girls, are we or are we not here in the interests of society?"

Omnes: "Certainly!"

"Very well! And is it not imperative that we should expose this abominable plot, and discover this impudent intruder, before going on to Brighton for Christmas, where, take my word for it, if all I hear and suspect be verified, we shall have our work cut out to find the long and the short of the mystery concerning the famous Minister. Now is our time or never! Girls, separate, and go two and two for safety's sake; let more careful search be made; examine this house from roof to basement; and may the blessing of the Goddess of Justice rest upon your devotion! I will go alone."

After this impressive invocation there was profound silence, broken by Aunt Dido, who thought "a little something" first might animate their much-tried, languishing endurance. But Miss Penelope would permit no indulgence in the ranks, and with wonderful heroism the battalion divided.

Then Miss Penelope turned with anxiety to her nephew—

"If it was not for this shocking occurrence, Horace, I should be seriously concerned about dear Aunt Dido; I fear she is going into a consumption."

Her nephew was cruel enough to laugh outright, "I think it is a clear case of consumption."

With a sternly reproving gesture, Miss Penelope indicated her abhorrence of the jest.

"It is exceedingly annoying dear Marion took those keys!"

"They will be here shortly, if you have done as you tell me."

"Yes, but what are we to do? We brought no fancy-work; the very work-boxes are locked, so that we can not be at plain sewing."

When the aunts were at their needle-work the confusion of tongues outvied that of the sewing ladies in *Geneviève de Brabant.*

"Lend me your bunch, Horace; possibly we may contrive to open some of the drawers."

"It is very probable; but do you think, as a matter of courtesy, not to say of propriety, it will be the correct thing to do?"

"Don't you trouble about that. We will watch over the propriety. All I can say is, my suspicions are yet further aroused. If it is improper for us to open the drawers, there must be something not proper for us to see; hence we ought to see it."

Sir Horace smiled at this naïve reasoning. The smile exasperated Miss Penelope, who exclaimed, "I feel it is our duty to have in a lock-smith, and every box and drawer opened, for we are upon the brink of discovering a terrible crime, or I am mistaken. Oh, Horace, unhappy man, spare us! I conjure you to spare your much-troubled aunts further anxiety, which is killing us, by handing me your bunch of keys!"

"Well, I do certainly think you are the most annoying staff of mischief-making old women to be found in the country. Any where but in England you would have been locked up long ago. What society can want with such blue-bottles, wasps, and cockatrices, I can not imagine!"

Miss Penelope gave vent to a piercing scream; she had never been spoken to so plainly before in all the course of her honored professional career. It was shrill as a railway whistle, and recalled her straggling adherents, who swarmed to her assistance with a chorus of inquiry. Miss Penelope, pointing the finger of scorn and outraged sensitiveness at that ingrate, her nephew, cried—

"He calls us 'cockatrices!' Girls, dear ones, my heart is broken! Did you ever hear of such a thing? After all we have done, all we have suffered, this is our reward!"

"We shall not forget this, Horace," said Miss Iphigenia, with acute sorrow.

"I will abide by your recollection, aunt. I consider such bands of disturbing scandal-mongers the pests of human happiness, existing but to blight man's confidence and wreck woman's honor; living in a poisonous atmosphere upon garbage, with an unclean taste compared with which that of wolves and vultures is sweetness itself. I have the disgrace and irreparable calamity to be connected with you by relationship, and therefore do not expel you, but I sincerely hope one of these days you will meet with a summary dismissal that will teach you a lesson for the remainder of your lives."

They recoiled a step before this outburst of supplementary invective, but Miss Penelope was not to be scared.

"Girls, give me a chair!" A chair was brought, and the leader seated herself stiffly. "It is well, nephew Sir Horace Vivian, that you are appearing in your true colors. You are not the first who has browbeaten the witness when under examination, and thus tried to avert impending punishment. The breach of decorum of which you have been guilty, the immoral conduct, the terrible mystery attendant, exposure imminent, all now staring you in the face, you are driven to desperation, and turn upon your best friends—those trying to save you from the consequences of your folly—in a manner at once diabolical and convincing, were any other proof needed, of the enormity of your crime. But don't you trouble, Horace; your aunts are not to be maligned from the path of duty and the defense of decency."

"Amen!" murmured Miss Vesta, devoutly; and, much impressed by their leader's reply, the others plucked up again.

"I will drop a line to my servants," said Sir Horace, with coolness, changing the discussion, "requesting their return. In all probability Marion and the girls will be with us to-morrow, and may not feel as disposed to rough it as yourselves."

"By all means! Very sensible of you. We were wishing to see your servants, if up to the mark, early risers, tidy dressers, clean at their work, small eaters, not wasteful, not fast-looking, and wearing decent and modest caps. We flatter ourselves we know what servants are, changing them as we do about every month; but I'll soon set you to rights, don't you fear, Horace. It's cruel to think of those poor dear girls of yours—inexperienced, guileless, unacquainted with the ways of the designing set, and, in so many words, lambs to the slaughter."

Sir Horace shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of mild contempt. "You may rest assured I shall not permit you or any one to interfere with my daughters' domestic arrangements."

"Oh, of course, you have something contradictory to propose to every scheme of reform we submit. Just like the men; obstinate as mules."

"I am sorry your experience has proved that unkind fact."

Miss Penelope deigned no reply, but ran on with her gabble. "And this new companion—a most responsible situation, and well paid for, I'll be bound. We must see this person, consider her capacities with a clearer judgment than yourself or the dear girls would be likely to bestow, and tell you honestly if we think her qualified for the situation."

"You need not trouble. Your opinion is not courted."

"There, girls! You heard that with your own ears! And he called us blue-bottles and cockatrices!"

Glances of deep loathing turned their faces sombre.

Sir Horace began to feel uneasy concerning his charming captive, whom he did not want to be stifled.

"I don't think you've seen the banner-screen Marion worked."

"Gracious! A banner-screen, and we have not seen it! Just what I said—every thing is hidden away in those drawers."

"I'll go and fetch it."

"And I'll go with you, and carry the candle, for you're a shocking one at dropping the grease; all the stair carpets want brown paper and a hot iron passing over them. I tripped and nearly broke my leg running after a spark you set flying in the corridor; we are so nervous about fire."

"It would certainly tax Captain Shaw's good fellows to the utmost to extricate your party in the event of such a calamity." And a wicked vision of a glorious hecatomb that should relieve the world of this obnoxious band flitted before Sir Horace while accompanying its leader bearing the light. There was no alternative: they went in quest of the banner-screen in company. It was in a chest of drawers close to the hiding-place of the captive, and Sir Horace talked very loud upon entering the room, lest the little one should give vent to an exclamation of joy upon hearing his advance.

All was quiet. He unlocked the drawer where very elegant specimens of fancy-work were neatly arranged in order. To Sir Horace's horror his aunt stooped and began smelling in the vicinity of the old oak chest.

"Am I mistaken, Horace, or do I smell peppermint?"

It was but too true—that child had been at the bonbons, and a particularly pungent odor was pervading the room.

"Well—there—certainly—is—a pepperminty odor somewhere about."

"Yes! and if I'm not mistaken, this precious companion, about whom our opinion is discarded, keeps a sly bottle somewhere, and the cork has come out. If you don't have this old chest open—for this is where it proceeds from—every thing will be spoiled. The moth is bad enough, but peppermint! Why, my goodness me! Fancy going into society smelling of that!"

Replacing the contents of the drawer, Sir Horace was careful to leave his latch-key on the chest. He hoped the child would discover it, and be quick enough to escape to the study.

"Well, I'll run down with the screen, or they will be getting impatient."

"I will go with you," remarked Miss Penelope, imperiously.

"And we will then return to the peppermint—"

"And have it removed, please, or I shall not sleep a wink all night. There is one thing I have a decided objection to, and that is the smell of peppermint; but if admitted—vulgarly admitted—into any house where I may be staying, I must beg leave to superintend its instant removal."

"I sympathize with your delicacy; I don't like it myself."

"I well remember dear father once saying to me, 'Penny, had a single onion grown upon Olympus, not a god would have ventured upon that transcendent height!' I wonder what he would have said under the provocation of peppermint in his bedroom!"

They found the ladies in the drawing-room; the banner-screen was examined, and great was the discussion thereon. Sir Horace took care to keep it up as long as possible. Then the entire party proceeded to Miss Penelope's chamber in search of peppermint.

A single movement in the chest would have warned Sir Horace that his charge had been unable to release herself from her concealment, and he would have withdrawn his party by some means; but all was still. She had, indeed, made good use of her time, having crept through the broken back of the chest, which stood sufficiently distant from the wall to allow her to escape; she found the latch-key and hastened back to the study.

"Now," cried Miss Penelope, catching up the keys, "we'll see all about this lady companion indeed, with her smuggled peppermint and superior ways!"

Down upon her knees went the leader, the aunts all bending over her with eager expectancy; Miss Dido was the only unexcited one of the party, but then Miss Dido was munching a cheese-cake. A key was found and the old cashmeres were had out and unrolled—the well-known lady colors so dear from having been worn long years ago, antique styles, and fashions passed away, and lengths and widths unpicked and pinned in parcels of separate sweet-hued periods; but they found never a thing save this—a tiny strip of paper, the motto of one of the bonbons. This, however, caused an electric shock, and biting of lips, and grewsome looks at Sir Horace. The motto ran—

He who conceals his love from slander's grave attack
Shows skill in that which puts it off the track;
And gives the lie on cunning mischief bent,
The grim desert of being off the scent.
Each scandal-loving spinster-maid
Shall thus of this be made afraid.

"Better go down to supper, I think," said Aunt Dido.

The confusion of the goddesses was complete, but how indefatigable was that Aunt Penelope!

"Don't you trouble, Horace, we'll find out the composer of that little hymn. Girls," facing round and addressing the squadron with military precision, "I see it all! Girls, sisters, my bosom heaves with indignation! Between this amorous and libidinous effusion there is bacchanal connection with the horrible spirit we came to remove; and I have sad doubts, which it may not be prudent to disclose, concerning this model companion—companion, indeed!"

Here was a diversion from the original, and the quiet, beautiful widow-lady whom Sir Horace honored exceedingly stood now in jeopardy. Leaving his aunts to digest the lyric of the bonbon, Sir Horace walked down to the library, wondering much whether his little friend had placed it there purposely. "If so," he said to himself, "she is the shrewdest young monkey I've met with!"

Sir Horace permitted a long interval to elapse. His relatives did not disturb him, and he heard them go quietly down to supper and next go as quietly up stairs again. Then hearing one and another of their chamber doors close softly, he concluded they had retired for the night, and he felt highly relieved in consequence. To make certain, Sir Horace went to the foot of the stairs and listened intently. All was silent, and he was about returning to the library, when a cold gust of wind met him, and set his teeth chattering. He at once thought of his young charge, and hoped the fire had not gone out in the studio, for it was a cold, blustering night, and he feared she would be lonely and cheerless. He would go to her. A task of some difficulty, since he did not know how to communicate with her. He was in favor of trying the court-yard, and a bare alternative was here presented between a shout (eminently hazardous), and a pebble to be thrown at her window. He accepted the latter, and went immediately in quest of the missile; but the flags were barren, so, finding the door unfastened, he explored the narrow lane as diligently as though searching for the original philosopher's stone. The wind, however, cut round his somewhat tender head with disrespectful sharpness, and Sir Horace returned hastily for his warm reading-cap. The door had been closed and secured upon the inner side, and Sir Horace stood, a dismayed and shivering exile, attempting to obtain an entrance. The effort proved fruitless, and he hurried round to the front.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW ROLF'S BURGLARY.

When Mr. Bartholomew returned from certain important business he had strode forth to see to, and entered the dingy tenement in Gray's Inn Road, it was to discover the fascinating Mrs. Rolf calmly slumbering, and the little girl he had taken the trouble to entrap for the chief flown no one knew whither. And Mr. Bartholomew severely reproached himself for his carelessness; but roughly awakening the presiding genius of his untidy apartments, he reprimanded that lady with even greater severity.

"A pretty thing, truly! No sooner caught and safely caged than she has slipped through our fingers. Leave a woman alone for blundering, if she anyhow can."

"Steady, Bartholomew, steady. Many's the time my assistance has been of service."

"And might have been now. Didn't I tell you Barnard was going to hold the child in reserve for finishing off the Minister?"

"I know. I'm awfully sorry! But now, think. Where will she be likely to go? Does she know where this Mr. Percival lives?"

"I believe not. No."

"Does she know where her mother is living?"

"Sure to."

"And so surely will find her way there."

"Yes," said Mr. Bartholomew, looking thoughtfully at the golden coil coroneting his lady, "you are right; she will go there safe as the bank. I think I see my way to killing two birds with one stone, Mrs. Rolf. I happen to have an engagement down for that particular residence."

Mr. Bartholomew seated himself, rubbed the baldness crowning his long head, passed his thin fingers through the circle of scant gray hair, stretched his legs until his heels were planted one on either side the grate, and appeared deep in reflection. The florid, wolfish features became more prominent, cheek-bones rising high and hard before the flickering fire-light.

"Been to Queen Street to-day?" he asked, abruptly.

"Drove round this morning."

"Barnard at home?"

"He came in while I was there—asked whether you had returned."

Mr. Bartholomew nodded, still looking in the fire.

"Been to the warehouse?"

"Went on to the City after dinner." This precious pair so thoroughly understood each other, interrogation and reply were interchanged with a curt brevity that was eminently characteristic.

"Much business doing?"

"Things appeared at a stand-still—except for the talking going on among the young men."

"I'll talk 'em. Want of principle, Mrs. Rolf, eye-service; wasted time ranks next dishonesty." And like the venerable rogue he was, and very patriarch of hypocrites, the speaker looked gravely conscious of the unfaithful conduct of their clerks and warehousemen.

"Any thing further noticeable?"

"Yes. A man was looking at the Indian shawls; questions light and of no moment caught my attention, kept my eyes open, saw him narrowly examine every part of the warehouse, especially the books when he stood by the entry desk."

Mr. Bartholomew drew his breath shortly and whistled—a low danger signal of warning upon entering a tunnel; but he only said to the stylish blonde, "Some country customer, I suppose—new buyer. What was he like?"

"Medium height, thin, pale, short whiskers meeting under the chin, shaggy eyebrows, gray hair, a quick, abrupt manner, stealthy watching expression when unnoticed; gentlemanly dress—all black; a long white hand, large blood-stone ring."

"Pass me the album." The lady handed him a bulky, shabby album. The pages were dirty from large thumb marks, the spaces contained portraits of those who were or might be objects of especial interest. At one of these he stopped, and held it over for the lady's recognition. "Is that him?" She nodded indifferently; apparently, now that she had called his attention to it, she dismissed it from her mind.

"Mr. Penfold," muttered Bartholomew to himself, "solicitor to Mr. Beresford Travers: Mr. Herbert Garston seen to enter the office on Saturday last; this means mischief." Then aloud, "I'll take the 'bus to Bishopsgate, my dear, and turn in at the 'Tuns' for half an hour."

It was the evening following upon that of the events narrated when Mr. Bartholomew set forth upon his pursuit of little Ella. He had no doubt whatever but that he should find the child domiciled in the house of Sir Horace Vivian. In his earlier and less lucrative days Mr. Rolf had participated in the privilege of entering at will such residences as would probably repay his skilled investigation; in other words, and in the language of the vulgar, Mr. Rolf was a more than ordinarily neat-handed burglar. He had, moreover, enjoyed the supreme honor of instructing his present chief in the accomplishment. Thus when he set forth with a nice little case of instruments, gravely respectable as some middle-class medical man, and playfully told the golden-haired lady he was about to make a call upon a friend, she, giving him a correspondingly playful thump upon the buttoned-over chest, said—

"You dear old sinner, you! Now mind and take care of yourself, for I don't want to go into weeds just yet."

A doleful sentiment, without depressing influence upon the philosophic artist, who, replying, "Leave me alone, my charmer, for taking care of myself. Ta! ta!" with a wolfish sort of kiss, and an oath at the wind for turning his umbrella inside out, before he had proceeded six steps, he jauntily made for the narrower and quieter thoroughfares, having a decided objection to the more garish and highly illumined pathways. Thus, in place of proceeding by Oxford Street, Mr. Bartholomew glided decorously round a corner, a shady corner where there did not happen to be a gas lamp or a dazzling gin palace, and along a shady street connected. By the quietest and shadiest of streets, coming out by the Marble Arch, and crossing the Park, he selected a dull-looking public-house, where he sat in the bar parlor until closing time, when he took an easy saunter along Knightsbridge, turning sharp at a dark alley, and waiting there within shadow of a doorway, from which he could see every passer-by while unseen. This was a move very customary in Mr. Rolf's tactics, and it was upon the self-protecting policy, it being so very uncertain whether those interested in his welfare were closer than he considered agreeable. With easy negligence, as though returning to some select home thereabouts, the tall man threaded Wilton Place and Wilton Crescent, and came into Belgrave Square, walking carelessly past the mansion whereat he was about to make a call, noticing with peculiar satisfaction that the family had retired for the night. Then the tall man disappeared; so suddenly, that, had any one been observing from the opposite side, it would have been difficult to define the precise spot of that abrupt vanishing. Mr. Rolf turned up again in a narrow lane at the rear of one side of the square, and proceeded to effect an entrance without delay.

It was Mr. Bartholomew Rolf who fastened the door upon the irate Sir Horace, that gentleman giving his aunts the credit for the hard-hearted action.

Mr. Rolf, thus master of the field for a time, far from suspecting the reception in store for him, stood at the foot of the great staircase. With the utmost caution and circumspection he removed his boots, which he stowed in the pockets of his overcoat, with a small implement in hand, taken from the case and folded in wash-leather, a thick woolen shawl, the property of the blonde, brought for the purpose of enveloping the child, and, if need be, stifling her cries, over his shoulder, he stealthily proceeded up stairs, and for so large a person he certainly moved at pleasure with singular lightness. Not so light but that he was heard, and that by the lynx-like ears of the goddess Penelope.

The quiet and contented retiring to rest of the tribe had been a craftily organized ruse, "whereby," said Miss Penelope, "we shall catch him. He will think we are asleep, and come stealing up stairs, and then will be our time; but be perfectly still, girls, until I give the signal, then let us pounce upon him." This ingenious conspiracy and ambuscade was accepted by all but Aunt Dido, who, having eaten an enormous supper, was troubled with heaviness upon the chest, and preferred retiring in earnest. The leader assented, for her sister was sometimes afflicted with tormented slumber arising of indigestion in its most punishing form.

Now it happened to be the chamber door of the ravenous goddess upon which Mr. Bartholomew first operated. That symmetrical plaything he carried incased in leather admitted him noiselessly. It has been described how that Mr. Bartholomew was not in any sense a prepossessing individual; indeed, his appearance was calculated to give any nervous person a very severe shock. Thus when Miss Dido, in the throes of nightmare, opened an eye customarily engaged upon similar research to that of the honey-bee, the seeking for sweet provender, that eye encountered, by the dim light of a six hours' burner deposited in the foot-bath, the ghastly-looking being glowering down upon her, she truly imagined Charon or some other infernal dignitary had waited upon her at last. Mr. Rolf, on his part, when the frilled-in face turned to the light, saw that he had entered the wrong apartment, and withdrew; it was not his design to molest any person, unless molested. Imagine his astonishment at seeing a strong body of females, whose number appeared countless, clustered upon the landing, which, dimly shadowy, might, for all he knew, hold in reserve a throng that would possibly rise in defense and cut off his retreat. Had he made a mistake in the house? Penetrated the sacred precincts of a convent? Or had he to brave the timorously excited garrison of a fashionable boarding-school? A variety of speculative questions darted through the fertile mind of Mr. Bartholomew. He was no melodramatic burglar with crowbar and dark-lantern; he rather practiced upon the fine-art principle, and thus had not the advantage of a light which would have revealed the number and strength of the enemy. Consciousness of a mistake somewhere dawned upon him, when the foremost of the shadowy females thus addressed him with sepulchral effect:

"So we've caught you, after all: the key to the mystery lies in dear Dido's room!"

"A private lunatic asylum," said Mr. Bartholomew to himself. He was of a brave nature, of a hardy calibre. There was but one thing on earth that he feared, and that was a female lunatic; but this gave promise of an attack by myriads of shadowy female lunatics, the foremost of whom closing upon him he deftly lassoed her with the amiable Mrs. Rolf's best woolen shawl; then, clearing the stairs six at a bound, made for the front-door amid the yells and shrieks of the astonished females. Forcing open the door, and knocking over a gentleman waiting to be admitted—the noble owner, in fact—Mr. Rolf made the circuit of the square with considerably more expedition than when upon the cool inspection of the buildings. He felt exceedingly savage, and, to a large extent, puzzled, and ultimately resolved that but one head could ever explain it, or deal with the odd occurrence—the head of his friend Noel Barnard.

CHAPTER XV.

SIR HORACE'S DEVICE.

When Sir Horace had recovered from the onslaught which fairly took his breath away, and entered his house, it was to discover his aunts standing step above step in a state of the wildest excitement. Their nephew was as much astonished as his devoted relatives; but these indulged in bitter censure, reproaching him for surreptitiously leaving the house in the dead of the night, and exposing them to peril from assassins and every thing else that is hideous stalking at midnight.

"Well, it's pretty certain," said Sir Horace, "that a man has obtained an entrance; but when and how is more than I can fathom; neither can I conceive what for."

"What for?" echoed Aunt Penelope, indignantly. "Why, of course he knew that we were here; his diabolical purpose glared upon us from his fierce eyes. It was abduction, Horace! In the miscreant who has fled before our determined resistance there lives the modern Brian de Bois-Guilbert. Feel thankful, Horace, your poor dear aunts have escaped the peril."

Sir Horace was wicked enough to laugh at this. "I think you may be mistaken," he said, simply; "the man's object was probably plunder."

"Just what we say; and we wish we had never entered this house—we feel no longer safe."

"Great Jove!" murmured the irreverent nephew, while the ladies hastened to the chamber of their sister with shocked and horrified expressions of countenance; for had not the midnight monster been seen to quit that very apartment? In sorry groups they stood around her couch, and the confused movement awoke the gentle sleeper. Self-possessed in a moment, and glancing at the circle of lowered eyelids, she asked, faintly, "How long to wait before breakfast?"

With a moan of anguish, utterly overcome, the more spiritualized Miss Penelope left the room. Sadder and wiser, the goddess sisters followed in her rear.

Meantime Sir Horace had availed himself of the opportunity to try the outer door of the retreat, and it yielded to his pressure. Little Ella had long expected his coming: she had been patiently waiting, unaware how near she had been to another and a worse danger. Sir Horace would not excite her terror by any description of recent events; and he had a more anxious thought, for, according to the natural order of things, this would be their last stolen meeting; Lady Vivian would certainly be home upon the morrow, and something must be done. Very tenderly he detailed pressing difficulties, and said,

"We shall soon have to part, I fear, my little girl; and I am sorry. I should be glad if you could stay with us entirely, and look upon our house as your home."

"And I should be glad also, for I love you very much—very much!"

Her eyes were full of tears; she had taken his hand half reverently and pressed it to her lips. It was a pretty action, and moved him; he kissed her white brow gratefully. "You are a dear affectionate child, and should not be tossing upon the sea of life alone."

"Nay, I have my mother; and when I once find her, all will be well."

"Poor child!" thought Sir Horace; "how simple she talks, little thinking of all that may have happened to her mother long ere this!" Then aloud, "Yes, but until your mother is restored to you, something must be done; you will require looking after, and this is what I am worrying my head over."

Ella seemed thoughtful, and for a time was silent. Sir Horace also was quietly revolving his plans. "I wonder whether she would?" he asked of himself, aloud. "It might at least be represented to her." Ella thought he referred to her ladyship; and it was with a beating heart she heard him thus explain—

"The lady who is now acting as the friend and travelling companion of my daughters told me she either had, or once had—I'm sure I forget which—a little girl, and I noticed that her voice trembled when she alluded to the child. From the emotion displayed I am sure she loved her child ardently, and would, I feel certain, be won by your present motherless position. If I could but represent the whole affair to this lady, she might, at least for a time (until your own mother be discovered), adopt you as her daughter. This just occurs to me as a means of extricating us from our plight; what do you think of it?"

Thrilled and affected beyond measure, the naturally ingenuous and warm-hearted little girl could sustain her part no longer, but bursting into tears, half of joy and half of sorrow that she had not told him before, and burning hot with lovely confusion, she explained all to him with a broken quivering eloquence that was inexpressibly touching.

The genial Sir Horace grasped both the humor of the situation and the delicate position in which the child had found herself placed. While fully sympathizing with her reticence he was charmed with the outburst of candor, and said, cheerfully, "Well, do not cry, little girl; my scheme will answer just as well, and a degree better: make yourself quite happy; we shall manage it beautifully, I can see!"

Happy! Nay, the birds twittering away below the eaves were not more happy than was Ella now, with her mind relieved of any sense of duplicity, and her heart's truest affections permitted to assert their sovereignty.

Her gratitude—and upon this she could put no control—was very deep, too deep for many words; and when, later on, Sir Horace returned to his books, he felt more satisfied and self-possessed than for a long time past.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WALTER" PROMPTS REMEMBRANCE OF ST. AUBYN.

THERE was delicate entanglement at the woodland studio. Lord Ellerby, with his love of youth and of beauty, and his intense sympathy with the artistic and the aspirations for the ideal, could not but be deeply interested in the impassioned boy with the lovely face; and, partly for his own pleasure, partly for the pleasure of the boy's friend "Walter," he gave him open invitation to the house. This Master Lorry accepted unhesitatingly; it was too great a temptation to resist. Besides, Lorry was eminently dutiful, and his clever mamma had so strictly enjoined him, if by good fortune he should cross paths with St. Aubyn's fugitive, to improve his acquaintance with that vivacious young lady, that he felt bound to do so. Moreover, he was impressed by her beauty, and a little startled and much perplexed by the quaintness of her mode of conducting herself. Unconsciously he was falling into most perfect obedience and compliance with his accomplished parent's injunctions. He began to love this strange girl, and was proportionately perplexed, because, for the life of him, he could not understand which of his two companions he loved the most. But he was a little afraid of the high-spirited Lena, while fascinated by her childish ingenuousness and dainty moods, varied as the sunshine; and he would turn to "Walter" with appreciation stronger than ever, and dwell with the tenderest thoughts upon her graver and more exquisite charms. Altogether, there was delicate entanglement in the artist's home.

As a matter of fact, Lena was really exposed to considerable risk, what with the artist himself, and this captivating boy. She really and truly felt that she loved "Walter" with no slight measure of attachment. It was a curious dilemma, and it spoke volumes for her love for St. Aubyn that she preserved it pure, unapproached, uninjured, undiminished. Yet was she exposed to danger of a subtle kind, for the first time, all unsuspected by herself, and increasing with every hour. The result might have been perilous to that first place St. Aubyn occupied in her heart, had it not been for "Walter," who, very observant, knowing much of the world, and more of the heart, saw this girl—the friend, companion, sister—menaced by mixed hazard, and in imminent risk of being entoiled and enmeshed in the silken fetters of a foolish day-dream. So "Walter" talked to her gently of home, and fanned the memory of the past, awakening trepidation in her bosom, and leading the playful truant to consider how strange St. Aubyn must think this lengthened absence. "And be careful," said the monitor, "lest he should never forgive you. Great love may be bent, but it may also be broken; and not all the penitence of innocence and sorrow can heal wounds caused lightly and unthinkingly." Lena saddened thereat, but was very far from fearing any change of this kind in the love of her poet-guardian. "Still, for all that, I must be getting home as soon as ever I can!" she said. But the company of Lorry and the artist was very pleasant to her, and for the day at least she still staid on, despite that friendly warning.

She did not know the lonely soul that was beating its passionate sorrow out against the bars of its isolation; did not know of his awful seasons when despair was the pillow whereon his aching head tossed feverishly; did not know of an anguish, the plaint of sorrows that can not die, and wail of hopes that will not live. Lena knew nothing of the gray coast-line of trouble that sometimes bounds half a life, whereon pangs and memories loom massive as monster blocks of ebony, a Titan chain of sad remembrances which create the barrier forbidding passage. Such limits to a love were happily unknown to her, and, with the buoyancy of childhood, she thought that the tearful explanation, the caress and wooing to forgiveness, would make all right, and restore the tender kindness, ay, and the loving confidence; for the one would be useless without the other.

In that dim and solemn chapel to the right of the High Altar in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence, is a painting, the "Miracle" of Filippino Lippi, which possesses the curious attraction of failing to impress the beholder in any marked manner, but which grows upon one afterward when time and distance and change of scene should apparently obscure its detail and feature, if not its recollection altogether. The strange, subtle touches, the sensitive expression, the infinite delicacy, live vividly and dwell in the heart long after broad canvas dreams—the pride of the fair city of flowers—have faded from the mind. So Lena now reflected upon all that wondrous wealth of love and careful solicitude, all the delicate forethought and devoted tenderness, which from her childhood had been bestowed upon her by him from whom she had fled.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PILGRIM AND THE SHRINE.

A WOMAN, bitten by keen gusts of wind, was walking along a white road, bare of border foliage, the skeleton limbs of weird trees tracing fantastic figures upon her path.

A moon-lighted way, but bleak, scoured by the pioneer blasts of winter.

The wind cut the homely face, and scattered the bandings of gray hair with malicious disregard as often as she smoothed them patiently back, while she quickly continued her way as though some momentous issue were at stake.

She was an elderly woman, but a sturdy walker, and kept on with indomitable energy; past mile-stones that told how far she had come, how far she had to go; past finger-posts that pointed the way with spectral form, and bore the curt inscription To LONDON; past solitary churches, standing upon the outskirts of broad parishes, the moonlight defining the square and massive walls of stone; past dwellings of the wealthy, mansions isolated and environed by plantations, a light through crimson curtains reminding the pilgrim of another stately residence left far back upon the road; past farms, peacefully still; penned cattle below sloping sheds, gray ricks, ponds overspread with the first thin coat of ice; past cottages where the country-folk had long ago retired to rest—and the woman experiences a pang as each is left behind, remembering a small cottage in another part of England, where each night an old mother, laying her glasses upon the Bible, clasps her hands in silent prayer for her only daughter.

It is night, it is time for rest; it is cold, it is time for warmth; it is hunger-time with her, it is the season for refreshing exhausted nature; but she disregards them all obstinately.

Her small stock of money was lessening day by day; with homely calculation she had believed it would carry her through her journey if she spent none of it upon travelling. She had overheard sufficient of Mrs. Brandon's scheme to understand that the treacherous woman had succeeded in aiding the child's cherished wish. And when Martha Saxe learned this, after her suspicions had been aroused, and she had made fruitless search for Lena over the whole house and grounds, she never paused to ask herself if she were equal to the mission, but went straight to her own room and dressed for a long pilgrimage, saying nothing of her plan, and leaving unobserved, taking with her little enough, but yet her whole worldly wealth.

"He has been a good, kind master to me," she said, while descending the steep cliff, thinking how bitterly St. Aubyn's heart would be pierced should he return before his darling was brought back, "and Lena I love as though I were her foster-mother. I'll bring her back to him, if I walk my feet off, and kill myself with weariness."

It was a dogged, uncultivated fondness and devotion; but the heart was in it.

She knew that, for a long distance at least, the young explorer must keep to the old coaching road, for the line of railway was remote, and the nearest station was miles upon the route. And she walked very swiftly, hoping, after all, to overtake her fugitive young lady. Sad, disappointed in her search, toiling on from point to point with a heart that was growing heavier, accepting the consciousness that she must walk on to London to find her whom she sought. And she set forth upon the remainder, the apparently interminable remainder, of her pilgrimage with a devotion partaking more of the dumb faithfulness of the brutes than that of a human being. Merely a simple, uncultivated country-woman in domestic service; and upon this pitiless night march, blown upon, frost-nipped, faint with cold, aching with weariness, uncertain of the issue of her quest, not knowing and not caring for any thing else, for was not the child whom she loved—wayward, spoiled, fickle, petted, loved through it all and beyond it—adrift? Upon the wide world somewhere. Adrift!

And she had no compass, nor guide, nor chart, to direct her, save that love of hers, and for that she would walk till the child was found; would walk every street in the city, would walk till she dropped; and then—well, then she would sit at some street corner and watch every face that passed, watch by day and by night, watch till sight grew dim and eyes went blind; and then—then would sing through the streets, all the length and the breadth of them, sing one of the child's own favorite songs, sing until the child's voice answered, and her labor or her life would end.

There was plenty of sight and strength and sinew left as yet, however, and she marched sturdily on, crooning a ballad learned on the country-side where, with others, she had despoiled the hop-poles and gathered in the green bloom of Kentish gardens. It was rather a dolorous ditty out there by herself, and the crisp echoes seemed to snatch at it, and distort it into something supernaturally hollow and weird. She clapped her hands for warmth, and the noise frightened her. A rabbit ran across her path; like all the rest it was gray, and she thought this small comfort. How long the stars were in twinkling! Many a night she had watched beneath their tender light, but they seemed to dislike appearing upon this night of endless grayness. She passed a road-side ale-house; the sign was covered with rime, the porch crystallized, the wagoner's bench shining like glass, the horse-trough caked with ice, the small shed at the rear a dim, colorless hollow; no lights; all silent, while the tenants slept their first heavy sleep.

She just sighed, stamped with her feet, rubbed her hands together, and went on.

The ale-house was left behind; then there was a bleak common, a half-frozen morass, where a bed of alders, straight and thin, seemed to be holding a mist that had settled like a tent all about the fenny oasis. There was a strange building, where some man once had built a tower, and had seated himself therein at night, with a great glass by which he read star-language, the letters of which are countless; and when he had passed from his tower and flown to yet clearer knowledge, another man, to utilize the thing (not one with astronomical research), turned it into a chimney, added a lime-kiln, and made lime and bricks; earth again! But it had its uses; it cheered the tramping wayfarer, dispersed the chill mist, sent up a volume of smoke—only gray on gray certainly, but variety, which is the death of monotony. And it made a noise; a rumbling, subterranean noise, but it was a change from the quiet ghastliness of the way-side. Thus that tower and its lime-kiln corrected the quagmire, and, albeit with grumbling and with smoke, made it bearable; and this is the use of neighborliness.

What would society be without such corrective influences? What the air of summer without its poison-consuming flies? Martha Saxe did not trouble herself about this; she walked up to the burning mass brisk and brusque, warmed herself all round, and walked on again. A thin air seemed to have risen; there was a crispness and keenness, a tremulous quivering and peculiar distinctness, attached to things seen and heard. It was the birth of a new day, when the morrow had commenced; she did not know this, but attributed the singular feeling to quitting the kiln, and shook herself, and pinned her tartan shawl tighter, walking on with quicker strides and a reliant look up at the hueless vault, as she muttered—

"Bless 'em, the gems!"

It was the stars. As though suddenly released, they had burst forth, spread broad, o'erarching, glittering, merrily bright, as though joyous at being liberated; and they were wonderful company.

"Wherever have you been all this time?" and Martha looked at the most roguish as though she would like to give them a good shaking. She did not suppose they would hear, but it was sociable having a word with them; and as she recognized one after another as she had seen them nights back in her history, it was with as genial greeting as one bestows upon the faces of chance companions of our travel.

Once she asked a stranger how far it was to London. The destination had seemed nearer by a long span; but there were still miles to go, and she could not tell whether or not another day would close before she entered the city. "I wish I could go up yonder," she thought, "and look to see how far it is off!"

A clearer gray was extending far and wide. The limbs of long lines of trees were more sharply defined. No color as yet; the outline, however, became more vigorous, more easily traced upon the finer horizon. And still sparkling, as caught in the trellis of boughs, her friends, those cheering stars!

Not much poetry in her, but an uncultured piety that was deeper than culture, and this told of One who held those stars for guidance and direction. She passed a way-side chapel, unadorned, bare, bleak as the lands, yet it was of her faith; and she, who knew not it is the custom in countries far remote from her own, knelt down by its door and prayed that He who directed and guided both men and stars so wisely would shape her course unerringly.

Then she went on her way again.

Stones upon the road shone back the pale glimmer of the sky. "If these were jewels," she thought, "I would gather all I could carry, and sell them when I get to London, to help me in my search."

She passed a tiny brook. She had never been told of Tennyson, but she heard this babbling away, and said to it, "Why don't you tell me how far off my lady lies, by starlight?" She had once laughed pleasantly at the jingle, in an earlier home where the young master sang it, when he had been wont to tell this favorite servant of loves and peccadilloes he did not tell his parents.

The brook curved and cornered onward to a wood; the banks were laden with leaves, bronze seemingly, by daylight russet and red, as when, blushing to the sunset, they fell in odorous autumn.

She recalled the years gone by, the garden on the cliff, and thought yearningly of the little feet that had used to scatter other russet leaves while playing with the master's hound; of a kissable wee mouth lifted prettily for a caress; of a chase among the roses, and a bounding to the brink until her very heart had been still, and she could not cry out; of the little nook in the sloping lawn, where Princess had bidden her bury the slender limbs beneath whole showers of the fallen cactus bloom, and when the dainty little face peered from out the gorgeous coverlet like the sole white flower of a garden of crimson; of games at hide-and-seek, when, like some fairy, Lena would part the leaves of wide-spanned, pale-flowered shrubs, and glide upon her homely playmate from odd corners of the wilderness. It had been all one sweet and pleasant time, and if this faithful soul could restore it, she would feel content.

Somehow she had wandered away from the wide white road, although pursuing a parallel direction. She did not trouble, so long as she was right, and this was all in her way.

The brook wound down to a canal, a broad intersecting course, the paths of which in summertime were held in favor for the rural surroundings. Some distance ahead, advanced a light slowly along the sluggish water-ways where a barge was floating its weighty burden cityward. Nearer, a horse came in sight, toiling with jerky irregular progress along the bank. It all bore a weird, looming, silent effect, and the woman stood aside while the bulky freight glided past and on.

A wood extended almost to the bank of the canal. By its means, indeed, large rafts of timber had been floated thence to yards among great buildings, where a teeming population, going home from factory work, watched the thing wonderingly, and speculated on the distance to where those girded trees had grown.

The brook was left behind, the canal was lost sight of, the pathway bore round and through the wood until it joined the road some distance from the point where she left it. But she was not out of the wood yet.

Now she did not lose the path, or get lost, or discover a cave, or disturb poachers, or meet with any terrible adventure; but she did just come upon some still smouldering ashes of a goodly-sized fire not long since abandoned by a tribe of nomads, who, having broken up their camp, were journeying elsewhere.

There was sufficient heat remaining to warm this poor woman's hands, and she leaned over the embers of wood and peat, warming herself and feeling glad. She pulled the pieces together and made a comfortable little fire; she fanned this, and a well-dried twig was caught into a blaze. The recesses of the wood were lighted up, gaunt tree trunks stood forth like scaffolding, a maze of gray paths and misty coverts were discovered by the flickering blaze, a rusted trap was hanging from the branch of a tree, and the smoke crept up through rime-laden boughs, the wood crackled and made noises like footsteps on dried sticks, and from looking at the fire she could not see distinctly, yet as by glimmering consciousness she knew that she was not alone. Half afraid to turn her head, she felt her hands tremble above the blaze, which she now wished would suddenly die out, with all its attendant revelations. By a species of rude instinct she knew the quickest method of regaining the powers of vision was by looking fixedly upon something dark; she looked upon the ground, and gradually the sight adjusted its delicate perception. She could distinguish, ay, and discover! Upon the ground she saw a simple thing, no more than a small bow of tasteful ribbon, but it aroused her to instant cautiousness. She recognized it; made by her own hand, it had been worn at a tender throat by a cherished girl dear to her as life, and her whole being thrilled at the discovery.

With apparent carelessness, but with a fierce grip, she secured it, still certain some shadowy watch was upon her, and, while rising, she consigned it to her pocket; then turned, to find the chill warning verified.

Between the gray skeleton trees, in the front of gray paths and misty coverts, the gloomy recesses arching a long perspective of cloisters, there stood the man whose visit to the House upon the Cliff had caused wonder, whose singular presence had inspired feelings of blended distrust and awe.

Unfolding his arms, and striding into the open space beside the fire, Noel Barnard stood before the woman, with commanding attitude, and, as it seemed to her, a stern expression of countenance.

"I meet you far from home, Mrs. Saxe! May I ask what brings you out upon such a chilly night?"

With a quiet courtesy and perfect respect, the woman answered according to her custom—truthfully.

"Our young lady has been decoyed from her home: I overheard Mrs. Brandon trying to poison her mind and make her discontented. Directly I found the darling had left the house, while our master was away, I set off, to follow her, to find her, to bring her back."

It was a strange meeting this, in the gray dawn, by those smouldering embers; and the shifting lights or the thoughts troubling him caused the tall man's face to change curiously.

"You appear tired; how long have you been walking?"

"Every step of the way; you know how far back it is. I know nothing of miles and distance."

"A singular proceeding, Mrs. Saxe. Has it struck you the pursuit is a degree foolish?"

She turned upon him angrily. "It has struck me that may be the view taken of it; I do not heed; were the child all to you she has been to me, you might not call it foolish."

More gray, more troubled, became the face; then he held forth his white, weird hand.

"Give me your hand, Martha Saxe; you are an honest and faithful woman. Your devotion will be rewarded."

She gave him her hand, very much surprised, and trying, with shrewd common-sense, to reconcile the sudden apparition of this person with the discovery of that tell-tale bow of ribbon. She stole inquiring side looks all about her, that aroused cautiousness preparing her for any thing; she stole searching glances upon right hand and left hand, darting a quick scrutiny at the iron cast of features before her.

"I understand," he remarked, slowly, measuring his words, as by intuition he fathomed his companion's thoughts; "you wonder how far from a dropped gewgaw may the owner be found? Good: not far, so the loss be known. But now to ease your mind, my faithful soul, I will tell you that Miss St. Aubyn is perfectly safe, at no great distance from where we stand, and that you shall be with her very shortly."

The words were spoken seriously, with none of the characteristic mocking drollery, and she felt an intensity of gratitude beyond description. To hear that the child was safe, and that her sojourning-place was known to this stranger, first seen by the faithful woman as a guest at her master's table, caused her joy she had little expected thus early on her course. Simple though she was, foolish though she might be, her worth and patience and devotion were so marked that they won recognition even of her usually unimpressionable companion. He believed the heart would have beat its poor life out upon those lone roads and highways for the sake of that dearly loved fugitive, and he was right.

"Now listen to what I am about to say. Your young mistress is in the care of a gentleman who, were we to go by daylight and demand the fugitive, would probably refuse to hear any thing we had to say—first from his liking for her, and next for the sake of Mr. St. Aubyn, to whom alone, no doubt, he will voluntarily surrender her. I can admit you to the house and direct you to her chamber; are you prepared to undertake the rest?"

"I will go through fire and water for my dear child."

"Very well: you will have to go through neither. Leave your shoes down stairs and move about softly; cross the hall, mount the stairs facing the entrance; the second front-room above is occupied by Miss Lena; take care, however, your young lady does not scream and alarm the artistic dreamer in charge. Now, Mistress Martha Saxe, here are ten sovereigns wherewith to take yourself and companion home. You will keep any money remaining as a slight acknowledgment of your service. You wonder why I display this interest—this generous interest, as you will think it? Frankly, Mrs. Saxe, I am a philanthropist, having the welfare of your young lady and of all such very much at heart, and deeming it at once a privilege and a duty to help them when in my power. I feel for this poor child, so differently placed from what she ought to be, under the roof of the stranger, at the mercy of the deuce knows who! I see a tear in your eye, Mrs. Saxe. No? Ah, then I was mistaken; I am very tender-hearted—a sore failing; but never mind, it is better than being hard and stern and unfeeling: and you will take care to get her home quickly as possible, obliging me by not mentioning my name in connection with Miss St. Aubyn's recovery, either to herself or to her papa. Take all the credit, my dear Mrs. Saxe, for you richly deserve it."

"I will observe your wishes, Sir, and thank you kindly. I'm grateful to you, for if it wasn't for the help you are lending I might have been a long time finding my young lady, and a still longer time getting home again."

"Now for it, then; let's see what sort of a hand you are at a burglary. It behooves every honest person, Mrs. Saxe, to be acquainted with those arts practiced by the dishonest, in order that one may successfully understand the method of working recognized by the unprincipled. A few years ago I was presented to some monarch

—forget the fellow's name—out in the East—'Are you wise man or rogue?' asked he, recognizing no medium. Of course I would not understand the impertinent and personal query; but the interpreter explained to me that his Majesty greatly preferred the society of the latter, since he could learn so much from them of use in the government of his country, while their learning would not outshine his own. I immediately admitted myself to be the biggest rogue extant, whereupon he had the Grand Vizier stripped of his purple, and decked my unworthy self therewith; and the very first honorable duty appointed me was to break into the said Grand Vizier's palace and rob him of his last, and of course favorite, wife, whom the wicked monarch had likewise taken a fancy to. Our approaching exploit reminds me of it, Mrs. Saxe. If I hadn't previously received instruction in the operation from a reformed house-breaker, I shouldn't have known how to set about it, and should have sacrificed my head, for that enlightened monarch was one of those with whom failure was simply an introduction to the executioner. However, I had the honor of effecting an entrance; we also effected the theft; but in the morning his Sublime Majesty, coming to see the lady himself, discovered her to be contrary to his anticipations, and took a violent dislike to her. As rogue-in-chief the delicate and pleasant office fell to my lot the succeeding night of smuggling the fair Vizieress back again. Having deprived her spouse of the purple, he naturally exhibited any thing but an amicable regard for myself, and my ingenuity was again taxed how to save my head. I addressed the monarch at some length upon the glory attending the successful accomplishment of any uncommonly arduous undertaking, and told him how reluctant I should be to deprive him of one iota of his well-deserved renown—well-deserved, Mrs. Saxe, because he was the most terrible scamp in his very warm dominions. I discoursed at random (as is my custom in the presence of royalty, from the excitement consequent upon proximity thereto), but with extreme impressiveness, his majesty being particularly moved by my recounting how, in my own land, the poets made immortal the illustrious performers of such achievements. In short, I fired his ambition to so extraordinary a degree that he positively would not allow me to have any thing to do with it. And he accomplished the feat, conveyed the much-wronged lady back to the harem he had despoiled, and, I presume, had the additional temerity to run upon an ambush of ebony avengers, whose cimeters bereaved their country of its sire. Shocking goings on out that way, Mrs. Saxe! We have much to be thankful for: I hope you contribute to the Foreign Missions? I expect some day to be president of one of these estimable societies. 'I live with one hope, Mr. Barnard,' a lady friend said to me once; 'it is that you may yet address us in Exeter Hall.' 'Madam,' I answered, 'whenever the discernment of my fellow-creatures calls me to that noble platform, rest assured I shall not be backward in coming forward. Our race, like our books, has been my study; literally, I have lived upon the black and white, and I may say I have profited by this intimate fellowship.' She appeared to be much affected, but one can never tell whether this sort of thing is real, Mrs. Saxe; and if there is one thing more despicable than another, it is the assumption of false sentiment. Now cross the kitchen. Softly does it. Good-by, and don't forget."

All the time of his apparently idle chatter, which, like all that he said and did, had an object, he was leading the way; so taking up her attention that she had not noticed the route, beyond the lane leading to the main road; and before she was conscious of his actions, executed with the finesse of legerdemain, he opened the door of the woodland cottage, and she was lightly dismissed with the adieu described; and it was with a singular sensation that Mrs. Saxe thus found herself in somebody's kitchen at the break of the dawn. The bright pots and pans on the shining black shelf below the dresser recalled the ebony avengers and their cimeters, mentioned by her eccentric guide, and the poor country soul shuddered as she thought of the trouble and danger which might assail her. This part of her mission was distasteful; still she would not care if Lena was but found.

Standing thus, she reflected. Her instructions had directed her to pass by way of the kitchen door, opposite that through which she had come, to the hall, when she was to proceed by the stairs facing the entrance to the upper story, where the second front-room was occupied by her long-sought-for darling. All this was plain enough, yet the stealthy course necessary went against her scruples; such proceeding was contrary to the code of open honesty. Still, for her! It was for her! She closed the outer door softly, and so strong was the force of habit, even in the house of the stranger, locked it for security of the inmates. She removed her boots, finding time while sitting to unlace them to admire the resplendent cleanliness of the kitchen utensils. Then she noiselessly opened the kitchen door and crossed the hall. Its dusky woods and crowd of curious objects did not stop her; she came from a grander mansion, one room of which would have stored all the quaint trifles of this cottage; moreover, by the pale dim light they were seen in their most weird aspect, when color and form alike were almost imperceptible. On the stairs were hung paintings; these also seemed uncanny, classical pieces, and Martha knew nothing of the classical. A broad landing above, a long stretch of carpet of a dark shading, panelling of pine wood every where; two rows of doors, polished; and she stood before the second, facing the front of the house. She tried this gently and half reverently, feeling, however, surprised and sorry that it was not secured upon the inner side, thinking more for the moment of her young lady's safety than of the immediate object in view; she did not know that bolts and bars were foreign to the owner's theory. Thus the door opened easily, and she was at liberty to enter, and did so, taking the precaution to close it behind her. Instantly she was in another sphere, light, elegant, fair as are the chambers of the young in France, where wealth outvies itself upon chaste embellishment of the portals of sleep. She saw the child instantly, enshrined amidst muslin and lace, the dim light through pink curtains tinting the cheeks with a lovelier hue than Martha thought she had ever seen there; or it might have been the pretty flush from dreams, or the fancy after all that the darling was more beautiful in her eyes than of old.

With great tenderness she awoke her, hushing the little startled cry with kisses.

Raising herself upon the pillows, Lena put her arms about the woman's neck.

"Well, you are a dear darling old love of a Martha! But tell me, how is papa? How did you find me? Is he here? Was he very, very angry? Is—"

"Hush-sh! I want to get you away without any one knowing, in case it is prevented; you must dress, and wrap up well, and this time to-morrow you shall be in your own little bed at home."

"I must not leave like that; I have been treated so kindly, and I have a friend I don't like parting from—the most beautiful boy you ever saw in all your life, and so gentle, more like a girl. I am nothing to it."

Martha smiled, remembering various redoubtable adventures of which this wild one had been the heroine. Embracing her once again, she pleaded that no time might be lost. Still Lena was very irresolute, and Martha, with low, earnest speech, besought the child, for Mr. St. Aubyn's sake, to go with her, and at once.

Unwillingly assenting, unable to resist that strongest of pleas, she slowly dressed herself, and stood ready to accompany her new-found protector, whose ideas of right, and of the view Mr. St. Aubyn would entertain of it, all impelled her to hurry the child from the place as quickly as possible.

They made good a retreat without alarming any one in the house, and hastened along the lane and out upon the main road, without speaking, and feeling very cold and miserable in the frosty morning air.

"We shall find snow when we reach Yorkshire, or I am mistaken!" said Martha, with a weather-wise look at the sky.

"Never mind that so long as there is a warm welcome and papa's forgiveness for my naughtiness; but I can't think how you found out where I was. You've much to tell me."

"God, who directs the stars, Miss Lena, directed me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

REPULSED.

St. Aubyn could not have described to any human being the sorrow at his heart. There is a deeper pain than language tells, a sadder grief than friendship fathoms, and even the kind old pastor knew nothing of that extremity of suffering which the stricken man, like many another, kept veiled from all. In the lull between pain and pain, the pauses in the conflict of agony, the resting pillowed upon remembrance and hope, there visited him memory of old days of pain upon which this dreaded thing had loomed a shadow of what might by terrible misfortune befall him, when he had put it from him, hatefully. It required but little to thrill the old chords afresh and draw up from long years the wailing of dead pain, but little to trim the lamps in long avenues of gloomy thought, but little to strike the changes of forgotten sobs on heart-strings wet with tears.

The melancholy hauteur of manner increased. He would live alone with his sorrow as he had lived apart with his purpose. This he knew would have won no sympathy, so his trouble would possess no interest. Hence the solicitous efforts of first one and then the other of his deferential lady comforters caused him some slight surprise. Sometimes in the great drawing-room his eyes would rest wonderingly upon the woman who had been the friend and companion of her he had lost. It seemed strange, that immovable calmness in contrast with his tempest-shaken soul; she might have presided over the dominion of Repose, and represented the eternal concentration of Calm, so undisturbed was her serenity. He could not understand it. Why, he was all jarred and unstrung, trembling and languid as one weakened by severe illness! Then he would look long and yearningly at the other, the friend of the older years, who knew how he could love, knew how he had suffered; and there was only the long-remembered captivating smile, the pleasing play of amiability, the inseparable grace and elegance. And one was as great a mystery as the other in presence of his great sorrow. Goethe, even at the height of popularity, and in the full blaze of hero-worship, claimed for his thought a selectness of aristocracy which utterly excluded the familiar; so these feminine vulgarians, with their artifice and finesse, were, in spite of all the subtlety of overacted manœuvres, kept at immeasurable distance by that sad yet gracious hauteur, in which from the commencement of this trouble he had more than ever infolded himself. Terribly alive and sensitive to every thing that reminded him of her, he could not bear to hear the loved name mentioned; and this new sorrow revived the older trouble, brought up from well-nigh forgotten dreams the slumbering pain that still thrilled. Of course these comforters must harp, one upon the past, the other on the present—wearily to him—almost beyond his patience.

St. Aubyn's reflection upon human nature was not of the most gentle order; it was an increasing conviction that life is shockingly imperfect in its moral tendencies. Once the old pastor said to him—

"Much may be gathered of that portion of humanity even which has strayed; fair fruits of promise, and flowering gleams of goodness, brighter than will be gleaned in long galleries of virtues, reaching down the lives like rent-rolls; and these shreds of broken beauty, sorted and shaded, and pieced and blended, live with us long after the darker surroundings are dead."

But St. Aubyn would accept none of this reasoning; if the moral was good, somebody else might benefit by it. There was a line laid down in his own mind whereby human nature should abide, and if good there was, it would preserve itself consistent with that line; he could not go hunting about in the dark after an accident to find it.

Old Mr. Arden might argue, and did argue, that Lena could make many such explorations all uninfluenced and uninjured; but his friend was a passionate lover, and jealous of his love. Once gone, gone altogether, was the brief basis of his principle. But "Not so," said the apostle of forbearance, who, having outgrown love, could afford to extol forgiveness. "No heart so fond as the repentant."

There was a limbo for the repentant somewhere, doubtless, but it should not be at the House upon the Cliff. And over this matter the master rather inclined an ear to the subtle theory of the companion, who unceasingly, and with quiet delicacy, mourned for her poor darling exposed this long time to the allurements and poisonous temptations of the world.

"Why, then, do you take such extraordinary pains to recover her?" asked the pastor, hanging upon this his hope of a warmly cordial and loving welcome in the event of such recovery. It was taxing the misanthrope closely.

"I can not bear to think of her adrift upon the world. I would provide for her as I have ever done; place her at school, or in kind keeping, where I shall know she is happy and content, because improving her acquaintance with the world and society, begun thus auspiciously."

Without regarding the irony, the pastor added—

"In other words, you would retain possession, while debarring her from convincing you of her innocence, her unchanged love, her tender childhood? Very wrong, my friend."

"The 'possession,' as you prefer to put it, is mine to-day, another's to-morrow, and for all I know, a change each day, so long as that 'innocent' and 'unchanged love' you speak of may be prettily assumed. Oh, sweet sex! sweet sex!"

With a horrible moan, St. Aubyn covered his face with his hands.

Mr. Arden was much shocked. He admitted that his friend was aggrieved, but this sweeping lament, so bitter and vindictive, pained the kind mediator exceedingly.

"I have confidence in Lena," he said; "allow her to come to the parsonage, until you are wiser, calmer, more just." He added, sadly, and with much feeling: "You will know where she is, can see her when you wish, receive her back when welcome. I love the child as I might have loved a daughter of mine own."

The words set the sufferer quivering again; he was thinking of Willie. "No," he said, with a shudder; "I thank you, my friend, but I think the more remote the better." Then he felt angry with himself for the temporary weakness. But love does not die out so quickly; its tendrils are tenacious of their hold when strengthened by ten years' growth.

To the benignant pastor life was an open scroll, Truth its text, Trust its end, with compassion always fast twined with forbearance, and Forgiveness the fruit of our holiest endeavor. "We are so erring ourselves," he used to think, "so sinning, our whole time should be devoted to the forgiving of others." When he would remark in this wise to St. Aubyn, the latter's caustic rejoinder would stay prolongation of the argument. "Indiscriminate forgiveness," St. Aubyn would remark, "like indiscriminate love, is an infirmity; certain wrongs are beyond all forgiveness."

"Foremost of which is the injury from desertion, eh?"

"Foremost."

Then the pastor would be silent, the mild, kind countenance becoming very thoughtful. Sometimes the old man would remonstrate with his friend upon the futility of sitting down to brood over his grief, and would press the benefit of arousing and bestirring one's self when overweighted with trouble. He would murmur—

"Weep if thou wilt, but weep not thou too long;
Or weep and work, for work will lead to song.
Work on. One day, beyond all thoughts of praise,
A sunny joy will crown thy head with rays;"

but his friend would smile sadly and incredulously. "Have not I told you that I fled even to the East when my last blow fell? But I found no freedom there. Work is a sovereign remedy, but forgetfulness alone brings permanent relief. I must bury myself in my books."

And he buried himself in his books. All the persevering by-play of his guest, or the thoughtful attention of Lena's companion, could not woo him from those. But be sure he suffered all the more for it. He was generally alone in his private apartment, though sometimes in the evening he joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Vincent's stay was drawing to its close; she said she had but left home for a day or two. Her brief view of the position had impressed her with two convictions—first, that this Brandon, whom she had commenced by despising considerably, was an opponent more than worthy for her to enter the lists with; next, that Lord Lindon had changed for the worse. A recluse life had wrought its usual evil effect; the man was impervious to blandishment. She had one consolation, and rested upon it with content—the child had not been recovered, had not returned. As for Mrs. Brandon—"Well, if his lordship is fool enough," thought the widow, who never minced matters when communing with herself, "so let him!" but she honestly would have given her rival very little for her chance. Nevertheless, in this feline duel the black and white lady possessed an immense advantage; she was aware of it, and the consciousness fed her quiet decorum.

It was a matter of never-ceasing self-congratulation with Mrs. Brandon also that the child had been heard of no more. "Yes," she thought, "Lena St. Aubyn is wiped off beautifully." But there was the curious disappearance of Martha Saxe upon that same memorable day, and this perplexed and worried the black and white lady acutely. And sometimes she thought of the original of the portrait within her locket, and she would say to herself, "What's *he* up to, I wonder? Mischief, though, or he wouldn't be so quiet." Thus she grew painfully expectant and alert, and divided her time in attending to St. Aubyn and finessing with Mrs. Vincent.

Five-o'clock tea was over, the ladies were at work, St. Aubyn's hound was crouched before the fire, warm winter curtains were drawn close. It was a scene of peace and comfort strangely in contrast with the howling winds without, tumultuously besetting the craggy steep as though they would hurl the towering cliff into the depth of seething waters.

Mrs. Vincent gave a little shuddering glance over at the rattling casement.

"What a horrible place this must be in winter! I would as soon live in a light-house!"

"We didn't notice it when all together, united and happy; the elements had no power to dismay or affright us. There is so much, dear, in being supported by loving companionship."

And the women smiled sweetly upon one another, while clutching at their work with a motion suggestive of sharpening the claws. Their talk was carried on in a low tone, for the master, as usual, was reading; but he heard, as it was intended he should, and his brows contracted, his teeth met, and the breathing became a process of difficulty.

"A terrible evening to be out-of-doors! I trust all in whom we are interested are as safely housed and luxuriously comfortable as ourselves."

"You are thinking of—"

"Of my son, now staying in town, pursuing his studies."

The other purred, playfully patted a ball of wool, looked green and grim and ghastly out from the watchful eyes, and asked—

"Do you mind holding this skein while I unwind, dear? I am so close upon an entanglement."

"Not at all; so pleased, dear! Charming color! You are partial to yellow?"

The other bit her lip and unwound a little quicker, variegated wools, a warm-colored hank standing out upon the black and white, until from the other end of the room she must have shown tortoise-shell.

They had both been thinking of the child, and would both have rejoiced at her downfall from the cliff.

How intently he seemed absorbed in his book, never lifting his face from the page, its handsome perfection seemed marred by the firm-set purpose and legible pain! He too could be cruel; ay, cruel; he felt the steel within his very soul. The finer inner life, that mystery and majesty of the human race, with longing desire for more perfect peace, and endless yearning for the higher, was beautiful as, when a boy, he sat lonely beneath the oaks of Lindon, and gave himself to reverie, and created an ideal never to be found, it seemed, this side the grave. When he had settled in this house it was to rest upon rock, and to abandon the pursuit of shadows; and here he had been nurturing a dreamy, dangerous ideality, having no substantial essence, baneful as a narcotic, with a great awakening pain. And was he not wise enough to know that the intangible, the mystical, dreams which the soul of the sensitively cultured embraces so readily, are but *ignes fatui* by the higher discipline of the teaching compressed within these shattering disappointments? Be that as it may, he was morbidly changed, morose, cynical, doubting. What will release him from this lethargy of pain, this torpor of overwhelmed endurance? What will arouse the spirit burdened down by all this trouble?

Suddenly a ringing of the bell of the great court-yard gate caused the inmates of the apartment to start and look at one another.

With perfect self-possession, Mrs. Brandon, sweetly asking her fair assistant to hold the wool a few minutes, arose and left them. There was an embarrassing silence, an interval of painful suspense.

Once having quitted the drawing-room, Mrs. Brandon drew herself erect, and swiftly crossed the hall. She overtook a servant leisurely upon the way to discover the cause of the summons.

"I will go. It is a poor woman selling lace, I believe."

The servant was glad to return to the great fire in their own room, and gave place to the lady.

She crossed the court-yard, tying a pocket-handkerchief round her head, and it framed in a face more than usually ghastly.

It was gusty and blustering, and a few flakes of snow whitened the flags and upper ledges of the gate. There were crevices through which she could reconnoitre, and she did so. Blown upon, gray, stone-like, yet splendid, so fair was the face with the light of its honesty, Martha Saxe stood waiting admission. No other figure was to be seen, only that resolute, enduring woman. But Hortense Brandon was not going to allow her to enter there if she could prevent it, even though the nearest house was miles off, and the desolate, wintry way was unutterably dreary. With a determination the observer would not have given this quiet woman the credit of possessing, she untwisted at a junction the wire of the bell, and left it hanging as though broken by the force with which it had been pulled from without. Mrs. Brandon was not scrupulous when at extremes.

She returned noiselessly to the drawing-room and to her chair, winding on, with the remark to her lady friend holding the wool with particular care—

"Some tramp; it is dangerous permitting the servants to open the gate after dusk."

The hound stretched itself, turned round, and crouched before the fire, moved uneasily, then trotted over to its master, laying its head upon his knee, and looking in his face.

Wearily the student looked down in the large expressive eyes; their strange wistfulness struck him; it was almost a human expression. He shivered slightly; he was not superstitious, but—his darling had loved the dog; a love returned.

"Come, Ponto!" called Mrs. Brandon. "Good dog! Does he trouble you, Sir?"

"No, thanks; never mind. Is it snowing, Mrs. Brandon, or what sort of a night is it?"

"Bitterly cold, Sir; it has commenced to snow."

And he was cold as though out in it. *She* had been wont to love watching for the first to fall upon their garden.

He strode moodily from the room, to that chamber so pleasant in summer, which had deep glass doors opening to the garden. He seldom came here now, it was so redolent of memories of her.

Locking the door by which he entered, he, scarcely thinking of his actions, sat down in the accustomed chair, for the first time since her going, and watched the falling snow.

He had no lamp, and preferred the dim, hazy glimmer of the starlight through the snow. What though this room was shadowy? So were his hopes; so was his life!

With a throbbing brow and quick-beating pulse he saw the garden paths and lawn growing white beneath the still descent. He could scarcely breathe—the room had been closed for some days—and he crossed to the window and opened it; the cool air revived him, and he returned to his seat.

It was a dreamy, soothing process, watching the fall of the snow, and he began fancying all sorts of things, even that Lena flitted past the end of the path nearest the wall; and he smiled bitterly while chiding this fancy, foolish and insensate, for ever dwelling upon her. Yet the figure had appeared real enough, so distempered was his imagination.

Stay! There it was again; closer; by the window; a hand on it; and the man scarcely moved, so transfixed and enchained was he by this sudden appearance.

And she entered, seeing him instantly in the old place, and thought him sleeping.

She knelt by him, winding her arms about him, and tremulous with joy at finding him alone, happy now she was once more at home again.

She kissed him with marvellous warmth, and it burned him, writhing under her caresses; for, with instant agony of the jealous, he pictured the lessons she had received in the art, the experience she had acquired in the days of her absence. And she was dismayed to find herself put from him, while with chilling sternness he reproved the endearment.

"No, Lena! Save such demonstration of affection for the friends you have left, to return to your quiet, dull home."

At that, kneeling before him, her eyes filled with tears, and words cadenced with sorrow, she implored his forgiveness.

"My poor girl!" said he, with some show of tenderness, "you have but proved your claim to be ranked with your loyal sex. Why should I have supposed it possible for you to be different, whatever the measure of precaution taken? However, I am pleased to see you well, and back again; the majority would not have returned at all."

He was speaking collectedly, albeit very strangely: the tone seemed to freeze her. Longing for some extension of forgiveness and affection, she clasped her hands upon his knees, bowing her face, tears fast falling, sobs racking the slight form, and almost killing the inexorable one to whom she appealed.

"Come, come, do not cry like this; let me hear the story of your adventures. Whom—whom you have seen? Where you have been? How used, and why returned?"

And the sobbing explanation came, he never moving; thanks to the dim light, she did not see his face:

"After you had left, Mrs. Brandon assisted me to go, and I rode in a wagon until I came to a railway station, and from there took the train to London; every one was very kind to me. It was in the evening when I reached London, and I walked about until I was in a street called Regent Street, where I stood watching the lords and the ladies, and then went on to a square, and was standing by the gates of a palace, watching the nobility enter, when I addressed a gentleman hurrying by, asking him if I could anyhow see the lords and ladies, and he said, 'Certainly, at his house; many were coming!' And he took me there; but I did not stay very long, and he went with me to a French hotel and hired an apartment for my use that night, and, leaving me, returned home. I could not stop there for the noise, but walked out, and was out all night, passing the time in Covent Garden. It was all new and strange, and I would not have cared if you had been with me, dear. But you were not; still, I made the best of it. I became very weary, longing to be at home. In the morning some man procured me a cab, and I was driven through London on the road for home, intending to walk until coming to a small station, for I was afraid of the large ones in London. I was very hungry, and seeing a beautiful boy standing by a gate, I was going to ask him if he could tell me where I could get some luncheon, when he invited me into a cottage near by, where a friend of his, named Lord Ellerby, received me very kindly; and there I staid until last night, when I was frightened by a woman entering my bedroom and throwing her arms about me while she kissed me nearly to death. It was dear old Martha Saxe, who had been searching for me ever since the day I went, and had found me at last, and it is she who has brought me back. But the bell broke; we could make no one hear, and I finished by clambering over the wall."

She ceased; there was oppressive stillness. The narration had been as bad and worse than in his most disturbing moods he had dared to imagine: her simplicity and innocence heightened this very effect. He was paralyzed for a time, could literally pass no remark; but he drew himself away from her, and that was answer enough. Then she sank to the ground, still crying.

"Where is Martha Saxe?" he inquired, in a coldly abrupt tone.

"Outside the gate still, and she said she would rather wait there till morning than get over the wall, knowing your objection to that method of entrance."

He shuddered, remembering the day of the man Beech's appearance.

Then, raising her, he placed the trembling culprit before him, between the chair of justice and the wintry scene without, so typical now of his life. He spoke hoarsely, and with such pain it thrilled even her.

"You have made your choice, Lena, and will abide by it. You are welcome to occupy to-night the chamber long looked upon as yours; in the morning I must make some other arrangement. With all my love, which passes telling by words, I can not receive you back again; it would be constant pain to me, and I can not live in such continuous martyrdom. You have not known how I have loved you; but be this its proof, that, loving you still unutterably, I can thus put you from me."

She had anticipated indignation, reproaches, perhaps anger of a majestic kind that pardons while it reproves, but was unprepared for this torrent of chilling, sorrowing, immutable displeasure. She had been in the wrong, had been very naughty, had wounded him with thoughtless impulsiveness, and she repented sorely, but she could nohow see why, if he loved her, he should not forgive; particularly after she had told him all the truth, keeping nothing back, kneeling at his feet imploring forgiveness, and weeping as she had never wept before. Her spirit began to rise. By her creed Love forgives any thing. It was natural she would not take his view of the situation.

So she stood with fingers interlaced, waiting; he was looking out upon the garden.

"Perhaps," he said, "you would rather go to your room unobserved by the servants. In the morning please come down as usual, and as though nothing had happened. I will acquaint you with my wishes in the course of the day. Good-night."

She was glad of permission to retire, and moved a step toward the door; but then, acting upon an impulse she could not restrain, she returned to him, stood by his side, and—

"Kiss me, dear! *One!* I've not forgotten you for a minute, and would have come back the very next day could I have done so. Not one kiss?"

You are not the same; it is no longer like home." And with a little moan she fell back, for he was unyielding as a figure of iron. She felt it bitterly, and resented it; there seemed so harsh a rigor about this treatment of *her*, accustomed to the homage princesses claim.

She went from the room, and he, the instant she was gone, relaxed, and fell upon the couch in a brief interval of such keen agony that consciousness itself well-nigh departed. He had acted as he had determined, but what an awful struggle it was, with the great hunger to take her to his heart! Oh, he could be cruel! He had been cruel! She thought him cruel, and it added to his agony. Done in that chamber, sacred by its love and tenderness, old acts of solicitous holy care making it a retreat angels might have winged their bright presence unto. All the lovely associations seemed to rise against the profanation and add to the burden of his woe.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIRTUE IS ITS OWN REWARD.

Crouching by her master's gateway, with the stubborn, immovable faithfulness which characterized her, Martha Saxe had apparently taken up her quarters for the night. Wind might blow and snow might fall, but her back was against the door of home, and the child was safely housed. She could die upon the strength of that.

The snow fell thick, and she watched it accumulating upon the trees, covering them as with lace. Her old friends, the stars, were not visible; and she felt a strange peacefulness at having accomplished her purpose, and at being once more at home. It never struck her as thoughtless that Lena did not rush to the gate and admit her; she was simply and entirely content—and there is no bettering that.

But presently she heard the master's step; how well she knew it! He was coming with his own hand to admit her, perhaps out of gratitude; and pleasant anticipation kindled new warmth within her heart as she sprang to her feet.

But with what strange words, and in how cold a tone he spoke! So unlike him! "Master is not well," she thought to herself; "he has been fretting for her."

"Is Martha Saxe there, and alone?"

"Yes, Mr. St. Aubyn, and alone, Sir."

The gate was opened, and master and servant stood face to face beneath the snowy portals. She thought he looked dreadfully ill, yet more dignified. He bowed kindly, and thanked her sincerely for the service she had rendered. He asked her to follow him to his study, and she did so, tremulous now that it was all over. Sitting at his table, while unlocking a small drawer, he thus spoke:

"The service you have rendered me, Mrs. Saxe, is one that no money and no words ever can repay; but I had previously offered a reward of a thousand pounds to whoever brought back to my guardianship your young mistress, and this I have pleasure in now handing to you. It is poor acknowledgment for your devotion; but any request you may ask of me now or at a future time shall be granted, no matter what its nature or extent. Until then hold me your debtor and most grateful friend. Thanks; that will do."

She was so overcome by his generosity and gracious conduct that she scarcely knew what course to take, but with a deep courtesy, uttering her broken thanks, she retired.

Then he rang for his servant.

"Send Mrs. Brandon to me."

The lady entered quietly, and walked to the study table, appearing as unmoved as usual.

"You sent for me, Sir?"

"To say I shall not require your services after this evening: suit your own convenience in arranging the hour to-morrow for your departure. This note will settle the little account between us."

Elbow upon table, hand to his brow, the instant he had spoken he apparently resumed his reading, upon which he seemed engaged when she entered.

"This is a singular proceeding, Mr. St. Aubyn!" carefully placing the bank-note in her purse. "I hope every one may prove as faithful to you as I have been." It stung him, but he betrayed no impression, and she retired as quietly as she had entered.

"Bowled out after all!" said the lady elegantly to herself, returning to the drawing-room. The study bell was again heard, and almost immediately the servant appeared to say that Mr. St. Aubyn wished to speak with Mrs. Vincent in the study.

"What's the matter, I wonder?" murmured the widow to herself, as she darted a quick and searching glance at the not particularly pleasant face of her dear friend Mrs. Brandon.

Mr. St. Aubyn was still reading; he looked up wearily; she saw he was suffering acutely.

"Take a chair a moment or two, Anna. I will not detain you long, for I am not well to-night."

She did so, taking care gracefully to arrange the folds of her dress while sitting down. He did not speak for a minute or two, and she gave a little pull at the black velvet bow upon her wrist, which was limp at the loop. He fidgeted with the leaf of the book and was restless: she softly smoothed her hair above the brow. One of his feet darted out under the table as impelled by a twinge of pain he could not control; she carefully, lightly—a mere butterfly pass—wiped the corner of her mouth with the corner of her pocket-handkerchief, leaving the antipodal angle with *Anna* in fancy embroidery and a mock crest full in his view, if he happened to look her way after one of his spasmodic movements. She wondered what was coming; it might be something worth waiting for.

"Lena has returned."

She opened her eyes at that. "It will relieve you of much anxiety."

"Yes. I was very anxious. I am now pondering upon where to place her; I am not fond of schools."

She caught at her opportunity in an instant. "No, you would not be. The child needs a quiet, kind home, presided over by a motherly yet accomplished woman, who, although guardian and companion, would likewise be an instructor."

"Exactly; just what I was thinking, my friend. The difficulty is to find such a home."

"Would you feel disposed to intrust me with the care of your *protégée?* I shall be happy to oblige you in any way, and it will be society for myself now that my son is studying in London. We are very quiet—only myself and the maid, and no visitors."

"Really, I do not know how to thank you enough; you have taken a great burden of embarrassment from my mind. You will not feel hurt if I ask you to curtail your stay here? I do not wish Lena to resume her old occupations about the place; I could not, perhaps, part with her!" with a terrible sigh. "Some time to-morrow—early to-morrow—early as convenient to you—"

"Certainly, with pleasure; my time has almost expired, it will but make a difference of a few hours, and this is nothing to the pleasure of serving you. One of the maids shall assist me to pack this very night, and your man can go over early and order a conveyance to be at the foot of the Cliff, so that we might, if you are agreeable, start directly after breakfast."

"You are very good; I will not forget this kind sympathy."

"I don't think you will," said the lady to herself; then aloud, with her sweetest smile—

"You know it has always given me happiness to serve you. But I will not speak of this; you have met with so much that is false in life, I can well understand how instantly the heart recognizes the truthful."

"Alas! it has been on all sides of me of late years. I think, Anna, when a man loses his mother, from that time devotion, truth, and loyalty have perished in this world for him."

"And yet how different should be your conviction! One genuine woman of all the world, a tender helpmeet, a refined and cultured lady, your equal in thought, your loving disciple in taste, the delicate ministrant to your sympathies, how would one such reverse your judgment upon her sex! Good-night, good-night."

CHAPTER XX.

"TOWARD RESTORING THE CHURCH."

Pisgah Tabernacle was a plain, white-fronted edifice, the face of which sadly wanted washing. Within, although resembling a sepulchre, it could not by any stretch of the imagination be likened to a "whited" one. The tabernacle wanted doing up. Mr. Jones had no objection to its being done up, if the people would pay for it. But the people were poor, the Rev. Jacob Jones was poor, and the tabernacle remained unclean. It was situated in a by-street, in an unfashionable quarter, with a net-work of impoverished labor surrounding it, and an attractive church—Ritualistic—close by, so that altogether the tabernacle had a bad time of it.

Then the brilliant idea of having an additional collecting box just inside the door was started by a deacon of wondrous originality. At that time the three boxes were inscribed, CHURCH EXPENSES: WEEKLY OFFERING: and ORGAN FUND. A new box was procured. It became necessary to paint the object thereon, and Mr. Wriggle, the deacon, had selected DONATIONS TOWARD THE CLEANSING as an appropriate inscription. This was overruled by the Rev. Mr. Jones, who wisely thought the people would get outside before they had time to read the string of titles, and decide which to support. It was therefore abandoned, and this expressive appeal substituted: TOWARD RESTORING THE BUILDING.

Six months passed, during which Pisgah Tabernacle became several degrees dirtier. Then it was proposed that the "Restoration Box" should be opened, and seven farthings were disinterred. It was very evident the Pisgah congregation could not support every thing. Mr. Jones was not, however, a gentleman to be discouraged; he had been used to this sort of thing all his life. He had doubled the members of his church, and that was of infinitely more importance than cleaning down the building. Still the pastor thought a little spurring would not be amiss, and wrote to ask the new clergyman recently settled at the large church on the hill if he would kindly preach for him one Sunday at his convenience. Dr. Cricket was willing enough to help a struggling brother, but, as a point of etiquette, handed the letter to his deacons, before writing a courteous assent. These enlightened gentlemen, however, were of opinion it would not do at all. It was highly necessary the doctor should preserve position. The announcement of his going to preach in Mr. Jones's poky little place would excite much attention, would cause great talk, and the rest. Nevertheless, Dr. Cricket wrote his brother a very polite note, wishing him prosperity in his ministry, and invoking a blessing upon his work. This was cheap. Mr. Jones felt it, but inasmuch as a public man may not show all he feels, he placed the letter aside, to forget it as quickly as possible, but with an inward determination that the Cricket should never at any future time be heard upon his hearth.

Mr. Jones knew equally with his secular friends that every man has to hold a candle to the devil. Mr. Jones knew that the lesser preacher has to hold the candle to a good many. If this knowledge was distasteful to the reverend gentleman, he yet performed the ceremony perseveringly, and with conscientious regard for the welfare of his church.

Many rebuffs did the pastor meet with, and of a more unpleasant nature than that at the hands of Dr. Cricket; but he toiled on with honest and pious industry, thinking now and then that the more prosperous ones of his sect might help; but not repining overmuch, for his little church was filled, although with those who did not give.

One Sunday after service Miss Kitty Ticklewich, tripping from the organ gallery, saw the pastor walking down the centre aisle. "Just catch him," said Miss Kitty, with her juvenile and artless playfulness; and so she did, at the foot of the gallery stairs. He looked pale from the fatigue of conducting the long service. He shrank a little at sight of the rippling member of his choir. He tried to shirk it, but it was no use; he knew that the sirens who sought to undo St. Anthony had been at it ever since. He would have made good a retreat, but there was no outlet, so he looked kindly upon the maiden, extending his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Ticklewich? Quite well, I hope?"

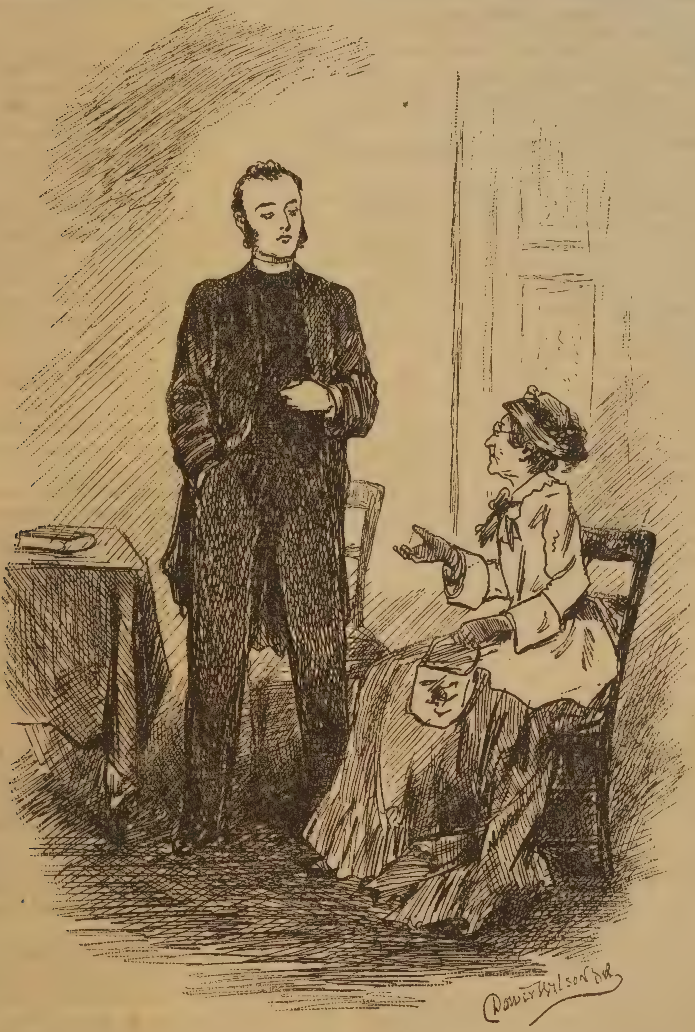
"La, Mr. Jones, you know I'm never ailing!" He did, to his cost.

"This is a glorious morning. Fine weather makes all the difference in our attendance."

"What a beautiful sermon you gave us this morning, Sir! Do you know" (with her most guileless cast below the sand-colored hair), "it has made me resolve to be *so* good!" She was looking out of the corners of her eyes, tips of her fingers meeting pleadingly over the hymn-book she was bearing homeward.

"I am very pleased, I'm sure, if any poor words of mine—"

"Not poor, Mr. Jones, dear Mr. Jones; I must say so, for having brought me to this way of thinking. Ah!" (with a heavy sigh) "what a life is yours, so lofty, so full of single devotedness!" The pastor recoiled a step.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"THE MINISTER HEARD HER ARTLESS TALE THROUGH WITH KIND ATTENTION."

"I do my best, Miss Ticklewich, no more, with the strength given me. My scope, as you know, is narrow; I often feel I want breathing room. Our chapel is sorely dilapidated. I had hoped before this to have set about its restoration, but friends seem backward, co-operators half-hearted, and thus the project lingers. However, it's no use looking upon the dark side. The old place having stood all these years will stand a long time yet, but it grieves a pastor to see the house of prayer month after month wanting a few repairs which a dozen with their shoulders to the wheel would soon see executed."

"Why don't you ask the famous preacher to help you?"

"I wrote to the doctor quite recently; but his engagements, he was sorry to say, prevented his acceding to my request."

"Bother the doctor!" cried Kitty Ticklewich, wickedly; "I mean Mr. Garland."

The pastor of Pisgah Tabernacle appeared properly shocked.

"Do you know what you are saying, Miss Ticklewich? Are you aware of the bitter scorn with which one in my position is looked upon by the Church of England? How much more would this be the case with this idol of fashion, having one of the largest congregations in the kingdom?"

"Rubbish! You entertain wrong notions of him. Go and call upon him, and he will assist us."

"No, Miss Ticklewich; principle forbids. I should not think it right."

"Well, shall I call for you, and tell him the truth?"

"I should say not. But I can not, of course, control your actions."

"I am very silly sometimes," said Miss Kitty, simply, "and they do indeed need controlling." The pastor thought so.

They parted, the old chapel-keeper wanting to lock the doors, and Mr. Jones objecting to talk in the street.

On the following day Miss Ticklewich called at Mr. Garland's, and was admitted to his presence without any ceremony.

The Minister heard her artless tale through with kind attention.

"Now," concluded Miss Ticklewich, with delightful candor, "it is, I know, an unusual thing for a clergyman of the Established Church to be appealed to for sympathy with a Nonconformist preacher, but I believe you are broadly charitable, and not biassed by sect. Our own people can not help, our denominational friends will not, the general public stand aloof, indifferent, and so we may go on to the day of doom. Our pastor has been to the people who subscribe to this, that, and the other, and got nothing out of them, owing, I suppose, to its being a chapel in an out-of-the-way district, and there being no subscription list. He has written to people of position, to tradesmen of wealth, and to those at a distance; a beggarly thirty shillings being the result. This wears down a man and sickens him. We can't get up a bazar, because our people haven't time to make things, and haven't money to buy materials. Mr. Jones wrote to some ladies, and they would have felt 'charmed to comply with his request, but'—mark the 'but,' Mr. Garland, please—'they were occupied upon preparing for the large bazar at the Dome in November.' Thus, up in the corner, as you may say, the idea occurred to me that you might assist us, and I mentioned this to Mr. Jones, who seemed outraged by the bare notion. Now I don't see things in that light; beggars mustn't be choosers, and poor pride is ignorance. So I determined to call upon you myself, and, begging your pardon for the liberty, I hope you're not offended. It's no distant missions nor trumped-up charity I'm pleading for, but a place of worship under one's very nose, and in the very centre of a necessitous neighborhood."

Miss Ticklewich did plead in her most sweetly persuasive manner. Whatever he might have thought, the Minister displayed no annoyance at the lady's audacious and vulgar, yet good-natured, efforts in behalf of her struggling little church.

"And what is the large sum necessary, Miss Ticklewich, for the restoration?"

"We think thirty-five pounds would do it thoroughly, Sir," replied the lady, quivering with delight, for by the kind expression she believed her errand was about to prove a successful one. But Mr. Garland, who thought as much of his poorer brother's feelings as of his own, would not wound that other's sensitiveness in this way.

"And very sincerely do I trust you may be saved from the disappointment of feeling the amount can not be raised. I am sure you will excuse me, knowing the many calls upon my purse, if I do not express my sympathy in a more practical and immediate manner."

Miss Ticklewich rose.

"Do I understand you are not going to do any thing for us? Well, I should never have believed it of you, Sir!"

The Minister smiled with great kindness. "I am sorry to dispel any roseate illusion you had formed concerning my power and inclination to help others, Miss Ticklewich."

"Put not your faith in princes!" murmured the lady, with plaintive sweetness. "Man! man! Alas! all flesh is grass!" and with inexpressible sadness Miss Ticklewich departed. Her idol was lowered from its pedestal, was mere breakable clay after all, was cracking fast. And the incensed spinster trotted over to her friend Miss Caddie to have a fling at it, and hear the news while lunching.

After she had gone, the Minister, with exquisite forethought, sent on a sealed, unaddressed envelope to his housekeeper in town, with it a slip requesting her to address it according to the direction given therewith, and post it in London. The envelope contained a bank-note for fifty pounds, inclosed in a sheet of letter-paper with this explanation: "*Toward restoring Mr. Jones's church, with a friend's kind wishes for his extended success in the ministry.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR HORACE'S SECRET IS DISCOVERED.

The honored aunts of Sir Horace Vivian set their adventurous minds upon riding in the Park. It was the morning following that day the incidents of which have been described. It was upon thirteen well-trained steeds the goddesses elected to make their advent at the fashionable meet.

Sir Horace attempted faint dissuasion, which was emphatically overruled.

"We know you are not fond of horseback, Horace, but for once you must surrender to our pleasure. Other girls ride, why not we? I beg to tell you, when your aunts were young—er—hem—younger, they rode like—like—"

"Centauresses!" suggested Sir Horace; which greatly pained his relatives.

"No, nephew; like those aerial spirits who guided the chariot of the sun. We have not forgotten, I hope, our skillful management of the beautiful equine animal."

It resulted in Sir Horace going to the livery-stables, and there arranging for the morning's use of the fourteen most tractable animals the stables could supply.

These formed a truly imposing procession, to the great delight of the urchins, who followed as perseveringly as when some circus parades the principal streets of a town.

An oak settee from the hall served for a stepping-stone. Aunt Penelope was the first to mount, and had only just acquainted her nephew that she felt like Queen Elizabeth, when she capsized, and had it not been for her clinging to the neck of her steed, she must have fallen to the ground. The little boys set up a shout, which the aunts instantly suppressed by turning the full force of their Medusa glare upon the offenders.

The graceful cavalcade was quickly formed in line, a crowd of domestics' caps appearing at the windows of three sides of the square.

They were just ready for the start, and their steeds were champing and rearing with impatience, when Aunt Dido remembered that riding always made her feel faint, and a basket of sandwiches, a seed-cake, and a bottle of home-made wine and water had to be fixed upon the saddle of the obliging Sir Horace, who tenderly hoped that this expedition would effectually deliver an overridden world of his aunts.

Then they set forth, some rude juvenile of advanced knowledge shouting something about Tam O'Shanter's witches.

We have all heard of the charge of the Light Brigade. The poor steeds therein have passed into the hackney epoch, but the descent of Sir Horace's party at the crossing forcibly reminded him of the well-known action, for his aunts rode over every thing, not from a Hun-like spirit so much as because they could not help it.

"Now, gawky!" called out a desperate-looking female whom Aunt Minerva had almost ridden down, "look where you're a-driving to!"

"Oh, my!" screamed another, "that's a riding-school!"

It was very unpleasant that the public would criticise, but there was nothing to do but submit, and press on for the Park, where ladies upon horses were not objects of unusual comment. They pressed on.

Rotten Row being reached, Sir Horace trusted all annoyance would be at an end; but they had not been there five minutes before he saw the most studiously fastidious of his friends advancing, accompanied by a lady, young and graceful, whom Sir Horace knew to be his recently wedded wife, to whom he had not yet been introduced. It was embarrassing to a degree. What would the attendant sirens be taken for? There was no avoiding them, and Sir Horace tried to wear a smile of *bonhomie.* He saw the lady draw attention to their approach, and immediately afterward look another way. He saw his friend adjust an eyeglass, then drop it pityingly and coolly, as usual, perhaps a little more so. Another instant and they were up with them. It was imperative to speak—must speak to one another; but Sir Horace had no conception what to say, or how to get out of it. His friend spoke first.

"Fine morning—hope you are quite well? Devil of a lot of fine women with you!" and rode on, with an august inclination, his companion looking another way during the interchange of civilities.

They had passed on, Sir Horace biting his lip with mortification. "What fellow," he said to himself, "could wave his hand over a flock like mine and say, 'My aunts!' I verily believe her ladyship suspected Bohemia, and that I was airing one of the music halls in the absence of my family."

"Don't you trouble, Horace!" cried Miss Penelope, observing their knight looked vexed. "We didn't want to be introduced. Your fine connections are not among our wants, but we do like things right and straightforward in the house. As for that woman's nose, it's a pity she didn't hold it a little higher, looking as if all the Park belonged to her, steering along for all the world like the figure-head of a ship! Some lady's-maid exalted in station, I'll be bound. Save us from want o' charity, but any body could see what she was. Now, girls—"

Highly indignant, Miss Penelope spurred forward, closely followed by the battalion.

There seemed an unusual number of nice people about that day, and Sir Horace and party were honored with no small share of attention. His friends looked coldly upon the cavalcade, as though upon a procession of nightmares.

They returned home, the ladies very fatigued, and Miss Dido exceedingly faint.

The servants arrived later, when an immediate diversion ensued, Miss Penelope considering it her emphatic duty to cross-question them upon where they had been, and whom they had been with. Then she came in to Sir Horace.

"Don't you trouble, nephew; but with such a lot of servants as you have about you, the place is going to rack and ruin as fast as ever it can. I never came near such an impertinent set—never! But I hope to work a radical change, if only for our poor dear Marion's sake, whom we hope soon to have with us now. As a beginning, I've told one of the maids to pile all the table linen on the dresser, just to see what you have and what you have not, for I declare you don't know: the tray cloths and table napkins kicking about that kitchen would make a saint weep. It is well we came as we did, for upon my word there is *no* management!"

"It seems you quite ignore my eldest daughter's position in the house, as well as that of the lady whom I have engaged for the express purpose."

"Yes, we'll soon settle *her!* We've heard quite enough about this precious companion—companion, indeed! Yes, I should think so."

"I may as well say now as when that much-abused person appears, that I shall maintain my authority in my own household in all matters connected with the engaging, retaining, or discharging of those in my employ, and certainly shall not permit any one of them to be insulted either by your officious self or your sisters."

"Girls! You hear," shrilly exclaimed their leader—"you hear the preliminary defense of this brazen creature! But it shall not save her from being told the truth. I've no patience with such; eating our nephew out of house and home, while the servants are doing pretty much as they like."

Later in the afternoon, when his aunts were up to their necks in the choicest of his damask, Sir Horace stole an interview with his little captive.

"Almost tired of being in prison, pretty one?"

"No, I like it; I could stay here for a long, long time yet."

"Well, you're going to, I hope."

She smiled archly. "With a *little* more liberty, you mean?"

"It will depend upon how you contrive to prepossess our friend in your favor," said he, with a sly look.

At which a warm glow tinged the child's face. As the time drew near she became tremulous lest any accident should mar their plan. Sir Horace went on to dress for dinner, and while thus engaged his party arrived. It took a long time for all the aunts to kiss or to be kissed by all their nieces, while Lady Vivian somewhat coldly gave her hand in turn to each; so that Sir Horace had time to send down to request the immediate attendance of Mrs. Thompson up stairs. This was done quietly and without attracting observation, by the most sensible of Sir Horace's servants, and presently the lady appeared, looking, if any thing, the better for the sea-voyage, and more delicately pretty than ever.

"I am glad to see you back, madam, although rather earlier than I wished; but no doubt Lady Vivian has explained to you that we are sometimes honored by—by—"

The lady smiled, and Sir Horace knew she was acquainted with all concerning the terrible infliction. He had now to account for the motive of their strange procedure, and briefly as possible Sir Horace thought it advisable to describe events. This he did, speaking glowingly of his young charge, and admitting her having crept by infinitesimal degrees right into his stupid old heart. She was greatly moved, and with tremulous emotion seemed to hang upon his utterance with such eager anxiety he would not delay an instant communicating the truth. This he did with the greatest delicacy, showing her at once the retreat where her darling was concealed, rightly judging she would be greatly relieved to retire to its privacy.

His attention was diverted by the approach of the party: his wife, daughters, and aunts, all talking at once, and Miss Penelope louder than any of them, their approach being signaled by the confusion of tongues. While they were yet some distance off the sensitive baronet had time to recover himself; and upon their arrival greeted his wife and daughters affectionately, if without demonstrative enthusiasm.

"And now," continued Miss Penelope, resuming the discourse this greeting interrupted, "I have only to say that a female has been, and we believe is, concealed in this house; we deemed it only proper to communicate with you, and advise your immediate return."

"And now that I have returned, Miss Penelope," said Lady Vivian, with severe stateliness, "allow me to assure you that any accusation you may make against Sir Horace will be treated with the contempt it deserves. I have always had the most implicit confidence in my husband, and the last people who could ever destroy that confidence are yourselves. Your presence in this house is unnecessary, undesired, and unwelcome. I need say no more."

With disdainful majesty Lady Vivian turned from the tribe, as though their very presence was loathsome to her.

"Better go down into the housekeeper's room, I think; I've come over quite sinking." Thus Aunt Dido to Aunt Phyllis.

"One moment, Marion. We will make good our charge, or perish in the attempt."

Lady Vivian turned to address her husband—

"You will make arrangements for your relatives' departure, Horace, as quickly as possible?"

"Yes, he'd better!" cried Miss Penelope, threateningly. "And this is our reward, is it, for trying to preserve the honor of the family, and hush up what must have proved a public scandal. But, there, some women can submit to any thing; and, of course, being away from home so much, you don't take the interest in it one might reasonably expect. We repeat, a female is concealed in this house, and we will not quit it until the minx is discovered!"

"To hasten the former desirable event, my dear aunts, perhaps I can assist the latter."

"There, girls! You hear him! He actually admits it!" Miss Penelope handed the bonbon effusion to Marion. "Read it, my love; let us hear what your mamma thinks of that." Laughing heartily, Miss Vivian read the ludicrous jingle aloud.

"Each scandal-loving spinster-maid
Shall thus of this be made afraid."

"Exactly my sentiments," said her ladyship, curtly.

"But we want to know how it came in that oak chest?" asked Aunt Minerva, sharply.

"A relic, I should think," merrily cried the youngest Miss Vivian, "of my school-days, when I know I used to store my treasures in so many different places, I often forgot where. I wish I'd one or two young playmates now! I get tired of my big sisters' company sometimes."

"Well, that's pretty and affectionate!" exclaimed Miss Iphigenia. "I only wish I was your ma! My word, but I'd keep you under, young lady!"

"Your interference is not required, Miss Iphigenia!" said her ladyship, stiffly.

"And it wasn't offered, ma'am," replied the other, equally unbending.

Lady Vivian drew herself up haughtily, with a look of unutterable scorn.

"You will permit me to pass?" To Miss Penelope.

"Oh, certainly! It seems you've brought some airs from the Continent, but you can't do it like that woman in the Park!" (Miss Penelope will never forget that woman in the Park.) "And it strikes me even your head will come down when you see what you will see. Girls! girls! To the studio!"

And therewith the fascinating speaker put herself at the head of her troop, and in compact order marched to the door of Sir Horace's *sanctum*. The door was found locked, when, placing her back against it, Miss Penelope stoutly demanded the key. Before Sir Horace could reply there was a slight rustle, and the much-abused companion appeared upon the scene. She looked very interesting in her sad garb, and was dressed with much good taste; her manners were quietly collected, and of themselves disarming; a touching softness in the lowered gaze, and so pensive and sweet an expression profiled against the group of ordinary faces there assembled, that the effect was to instantly quell the hubbub. Her actions were watched with cat-like scrutiny as she stood with perfect self-possession before the grim tribunal.

"So you're the new companion, are you?" contemptuously hissed the leading goddess.

Lady Vivian volunteered the reply, "This is my friend, and my daughters' friend."

"Yes, and your husband's friend, I should think." Aunt Penelope tossed her curls significantly. Sir Horace was slowly opening the door. "You know we *may* find nothing, for Horace is very deep."

That gentleman thought he would be deep enough to prevent recurrence of this invasion of the goddesses. The inner door was reached, and Aunt Penelope herself sharply opened it.

There sat the foundling over a book, not in the least disturbed by their entrance, and looking so pretty, the sight alone would have won the hearts of any but the spectral crew who had thus abruptly broken in upon her.

The aunts looked confounded at the discovery, but Miss Penelope, who was unprepared as any of them for it, had the presence of mind to exclaim, "There, girls! What did I tell you?" She looked round with triumph at her followers, craning their necks to obtain a glimpse of the phenomenon. Sir Horace was about to explain, when, to his surprise, Lady Vivian, looking inquiringly at the companion, asked, "The little girl you told me of?" and going up to the child, kissed her with much kindness. Then the youngest daughter of Sir Horace did the same, commenting affectionately upon the beauty of their little visitor. Holding the child's hand in hers, Mrs. Thompson turned toward the goddesses with this simple key to all the mystery, "My little girl, ladies, kindly taken charge of by Sir Horace during my absence with his daughters."

The resemblance between mother and daughter was marked; the countenances of the thirteen aunts drooped simultaneously.

"And we shall still be very glad indeed to take charge of her," Sir Horace hastened to add, in order that there should be no mistake, of course after the interchange of meaning and kindly looks between himself and her ladyship.

"I shall drop if I don't have something to take!" Aunt Dido whispered to the dear one nearest her.

But Aunt Penelope's hour had come. She had played out her strategy and was vanquished. The rout of the Amazons was complete. Turning indignantly to her force, their leader thus declaimed, "Girls! darlings! We are of no further use here; nay, more, our company is not appreciated. We will go where true maidenly modesty and chivalrous womanly sympathy touch a kindred chord, and awaken that of the pure and untainted. Girls, we will visit our cousins the Comdarlingtons, of Brighton. I am only sorry we have remained here so long as we have, for Horace and his wife are downright ungrateful, and don't deserve the interest we have shown."

"Pleasant prospect for the Comdarlingtons!" whispered Sir Horace, while offering his arm to her ladyship. Turning with a graceful inclination of farewell, Lady Vivian thus addressed her husband's relatives at parting:

"I think it right to tell you, Miss Penelope, that it was not your mischief-making aspersion directed against my husband's honor which brought me back to England; it was simply the knowledge that you were in this house, of itself sufficient to require the immediate presence of its mistress. We shall esteem the relief afforded by your departure, and sincerely hope you will not trouble to come again. If, as I believe, you carry the same want of charity and love of mischief wherever you go, it is certain you must leave one general trail of sorrow and ill."

It came rather hard upon the devoted band, but Aunt Penelope, who had as many lives as a cat, resented it with spirit.

"It shows what you are!" she screamed. "Talking at your husband's relations in that manner. But we beg to inform you, madam, that long before you came interloping into the family we were there, and it will take a better than you to root us out of it. I should like to know where the family would have been by this time if it had not been for us?" Sir Horace and his lady heard no more; taking the child with them, and accompanied by its mother, they retired to the drawing-room. "I'm very sorry for your poor dear misguided mother, Marion," continued Aunt Penelope to the eldest Miss Vivian. "We have been thinking of you, dear children, acting in your behalf, who have no one to act for you, and are unable to act for yourselves. May you be preserved from the evil effects of such bad example! Poor lambs! poor lambs!"

"Poor wolves! poor wolves!" mimicked the youngest Miss Vivian, who was something of a rogue, while Miss Iphigenia, who overheard it, darted at her playful niece one of her most scathing looks.

Considerable was the commotion incidental to the departure of the force, and it was a pleasing sight when the little conqueror was installed in the very throne usurped by great Aunt Penelope. All embarrassment and worry over, the kind Sir Horace shone in his true colors, and a right courtly and genial gentleman did he appear. Lady Vivian laughed over his ludicrous account of the shifts to which he had been compelled to resort in order to preserve intact "the honor of the family." And Sir Horace laughed over the exceedingly clever plan, as he thought, adopted for extrication from their dilemma; a plan so clever as to be perfectly true. "But never mind," he said, good-humoredly, "let those laugh that win, and all's well that ends well."

Language were too feeble to paint the inward joy and thankfulness of the mother, who had little expected this reward upon her return to London. Thus strangely do things come about! To have her darling with her beneath the same roof, beloved even and made so much of by the family, was more than, in her wildest imagination, she had dared to hope for.

And Sir Horace would have the child with him constantly, and, it is not too much to say, was amply rewarded for his earlier contest in her behalf. "I don't know who is kindest to my little girl," the grateful mother would say, "yourself, her ladyship, or the dear young ladies." Mrs. Travers had only disclosed so much of her history as would enlist the sympathy of the kind-hearted family; but they detected the birth and recognized the gentle breeding, while loving her for the sweet amiability, her chief characteristic.

"I understand from the little girl that your poor husband used to write, ma'am—was a scholar, in short—and being, like myself, a lover of books, I apprehend he devoted the greater part of his time to literature?" This was the only allusion ever made to Lionel, and noticing that the subject was too affecting for the lady to converse upon, Sir Horace did not again recur to it. He troubled himself about nothing; he had escaped from the locusts, and had secured his foundling; he was simply satisfied. And his satisfaction took the form of visiting his club less and staying at home more. "Owing to my return," thought Lady Vivian, complacently, and general harmony prevailed. The child was very fond of him, and it was her delight to pass her time in the library or study. Flattered by this attachment, Sir Horace would find even more than usual in one or other of the rooms to engage his attention. "And as I grow grayer," he thought, "she will grow fairer, with all the bloom of stately girlhood making a poem of her years; and then will come the day when she will elect a younger hero upon whom to bestow attachment, one with brighter eye, more even teeth, and whiter hand; with a head clustered thick about with darker curls, and ways which woo and win. Ah, well! So true it is, one comes to love young life the more the wider seems the span!"

One day Sir Horace received a short note and present from his dear aunt Penelope. The note ran—

"DEAR NEPHEW,—Accept the inclosed from your sorrowing aunts, who yet hope to see that Bathsheba destroyed. PENELOPE."

The present was a perforated card or book marker, whereon was worded in scarlet silk this classical quotation from the poet—

"There is no strange handwriting on the wall,
Thro' all the midnight hum no threatening call,
Nor on the marble floor the stealthy fall
Of fatal footsteps. All is safe. Thou fool,
The avenging deities are shod with wool."
—W. ALLEN BUTLER.

"Complimentary!" was Sir Horace's brief comment. But he acknowledged his aunt's thoughtful little present, thus—

"DEAR AUNT,—Thanks for quotation. Accept inclosed in return, from your still unreformed yet dutiful HORACE."

A plain glazed card of Lady Vivian's, whereon, in the neatest of caligraphy, this double inscript—

"If Parliament were to consider the sporting with reputation of as much importance as sporting on manors, and pass an act for the preservation of fame, there are many who would thank them for the bill."—SHERIDAN.

"To hear an open slander is a curse;
But not to find an answer is a worse."—OVID.

And there was no reply received to this.

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CHAPTER XXII.

"WALTER" IS RECAPTURED.

WHEN, the morning following the flight of Lena from the home of Lord Ellerby, that mysterious event was brought to light, his lordship, shrugging his shoulders disgustedly, merely observed, "Well, I do think that young person the most singular being I have ever had to do with!" and dismissed it, bestowing more attention upon his charming pupil.

Lord Ellerby was excessively annoyed, but he never permitted these commonplace ailments to become apparent or to annoy him long, and he appeared pretty indifferent. Not so "Walter," whose interest, sympathy, and love clung tenaciously to the runaway maiden. "Walter" could not account for this strong prepossession; there it was, and she could not forget it, and even Lorry's company failed to erase the strong impression. The erratic young fugitive was, indeed, sorely missed by the three. "Walter" felt to some extent wounded; they had been even as sisters, and she thought her companion might at least have told her of any scheme she had in contemplation. This "Walter" believed to be the pursuit of her journey. She had so many times spoken anxiously of St. Aubyn; and then "Walter" recalled her own words with a pang, and took it to heart that these might have been instrumental in causing her friend sudden alarm. All this disturbed sensitive "Walter," and after Lorry's return to his art master at Kensington, in company with Lord Ellerby, she set forth on a long walk to try and find her friend, having apprised his lordship of her intention before he departed on his drive. He saw no objection, and playfully remarked, "Don't you run away from me as well!" and drove on. Lorry's last words were, "Do take care of yourself for my sake; and —I would go on to Mr. Percival's as quickly as possible; I am sure they will be very kind to you." "Walter" had told her boy friend all; and she thought his advice was good, and meant to act upon it shortly. Meantime she went on her walk. It occurred to her that Lena would in all probability go on to St. Alban's. She had mentioned the town, and said she was proceeding there when she encountered "Walter," who followed that direction, feeling she could rest content if only with a good-by kiss.

Now, all unknown to the child, and just without the town, was encamped the equestrian establishment that had passed her some nights previously upon the road. The large tent had been erected in a field known as the Fair Field, and around it were collected the cars and chariots which had rendered the one-o'clock procession through the streets of St. Alban's a spectacle for gaping wonder. A flag floated from the summit of the central pole, whereon the natives of Hertfordshire read RINGDOM AND TANNER. It was the afternoon performance, and the place was packed with a motley crowd, and judging from the screams of laughter, the circus gave every satisfaction. It must be confessed in the case of Ringdom and Tanner's Circus the horses were not the strongest point; the stereotyped **80** would have required looking for with very multiplying eyes, while the "elaborate pageant" had to be considerably diluted to make it extend the advertised mile. But what the proprietors lacked in equine force was compensated for by the talent of the company. A red-faced, raw-boned, audacious troupe it was, with clowns, vaulters, musical jesters, trick-act and bare-back riders, sylphs of the arena, jugglers, contortionists, and athletes; and last, but by no means least, a great attraction known as "Boneless Joey of Japan," the most fiend-like sprite that ever tied himself into a terrible knot; without backbone or any other bone —an India rubber demon run to seed. He had been wont to admire little "Walter," whose fear of him amounted to aversion. Somehow the priceless Joey had straggled from or tumbled off the great triumphal car, and by the laws governing or favoring such evil loves, his were the eyes to light on "Walter," as he hurried along to take his part in the performance already commenced. Spell-bound, the girl felt powerless, then darted a rapid look round to discover some outlet of escape. There was only the length of the street, and some yards ahead the old gray abbey walls; to be caught in its gloomy cloisters would be worse than to remain and face the danger where men and women passing to and fro held forth some hope of sympathy and help. As the snake fascinates the poor fluttering bird, he never removed his sinister transfixing gaze, stepping gingerly forward as one may when about to catch some winged beautiful creature that will take to timid flight; she could not remove her eyes, nor flee, but leaning against the door of a baker's shop, experienced the horrible feeling of every limb being lifeless while the heart beats at dangerous speed.

The movement of the creature, sinuous, coiling, soft, thrilled her with horror; she fell back a pace, and the start broke the influence. She hurriedly entered the shop. A woman serving behind the counter looked up, and, surprised by the wan, frightened face, asked if she was not well.

"Will you protect me?" gasped the pretty stranger; "that man is wishing to take me away against my will." The woman doubtless thought it very strange; she was not unkindly looking, and seemed interested by this delicate boy pleading for defense, and when the persecutor entered her shop she went round to the customers' side of the counter, and with arms akimbo, asked him what he wanted, while "Walter" stole behind her and near the door of her little sitting-room. Then Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner's valuable auxiliary accused the child of being an apprentice of the circus, and of running away from her masters. It seemed a serious charge, and the woman lowered her arms, turned slowly round, and asked: "Is this the truth?" The child's head drooped. Then, looking up with touching candor, she replied, "Yes. I was ill-used."

"If you belong to them I mustn't interfere." With a passionate cry, "Walter" caught hold of the woman's arm, but she was obdurate, entertaining strong ideas upon the runaway question, and actually saw the panting fragile child, overwhelmed by this indifference and pallid with terror, taken from the shop and away in the direction of the circus.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONSTANCE.

THE girls of Devon are extremely beautiful. Take a hay field, and glance at the tanned, rosy-cheeked peasantry; there is more splendor of face and form upon that odorous hedge-girt area than may sometimes be found in an entire county. Or take a village school in Devonshire, and look along the forms where girlhood sits at work, and one may see some of the loveliest faces conceivable. Yet again, take a bazar, flower show, concert, or one or other of those meets dear to womankind, and what a grouping together of sweet faces will be seen! Constance Evelyn was born in Devonshire and reared in Devonshire, and that air which seems to kindle beauty naturally had nurtured this exquisite girl, and that Devonshire sun which paints the glow of health as nowhere else had tinted the cheeks with a glow that shamed the beauties of Devon itself. And even as impurity floats over some whole counties like a miasma, infecting and polluting the entire surface of the people, so there are counties exempt from the abomination—counties where the meadows should be flecked with lilies from year's end to end, and where a white banner should be at the entrance to the towns, with these words upon its snowy breadth: "*Here girl or woman may dwell in safety.*" That would be well, for man would then know where to send his wife or daughters. Among such Elysian lands Devonshire ranks with honor. And Constance Evelyn, whose nature, character, and disposition were a happy blending of those fair traits rendering dear to us the names of Elaine and Evangeline, partook in her fairness of this purity of Devon. She had hardly passed the portals of her seventeenth year, and taken upon her the grace of graver girlhood, yet was so quietly gentle and so thoughtful, one might have supposed her of more advanced age.

The Minister had known her from childhood, had marked the beautiful expanding of that purity and thought, and the loveliness, like a dream: could he do otherwise than mark it? Often he had said to Evelyn, "Your daughter will be wondrously beautiful; do, pray, be careful with her!" But this was no more than brother or friend might think of, and say with highest motive. One day Mr. Evelyn had said, "I am thinking of sending Constance to boarding-school; I can not afford a good governess at home, and the child's education will suffer." This was long ago. His friend answered, "Pray do nothing of the kind. Engage the best governess procurable, and look to me for the payment of her salary." And the curate accepted this munificent offer, and Constance was expensively educated at the cost of their friend. Constance, with her delicately sensitive nature, became uncomfortable under this, upon passing into that thoughtful stage; but she had been so scrupulously reared to look upon this man as the best friend they possessed in all the world, so taught to regard him in the light of a benefactor and a princely genius of all good, that she gave him that touching reverence verging upon adoration which girls bestow upon the hero of their chaste and poetical musing. Not a being—not even one of her sweet girl companions—knew of the recesses in her heart where she treasured her tenderest idealism. To speak of it seemed sacrilege; even to think of it spoiled the delicate charm with its rapture of secret possession. And ere long this reserving of fine reveries and still weaving of beautiful dreams resolved itself into the one form possible; and Love was born. From thence set in a most blissful era, and this experience also was too sacred to be confided to every girl she met; so that what with the reverent adoration, the sensitive gratitude, the tender idealism, the halo of beauty, the shadowing of genius, the fascination, and the silken tyranny of love, this poor little mortal was deeply enamored long before leaving Torquay.

Before ever that event occurred, or was even broached, Constance knew all about the plight she was in. Nobody told her, because nobody knew of it; she discovered it herself under guidance of those instincts which are the feelers and susceptibilities of the perception; and the girl was troubled. The feeling seemed to her verging upon treachery, and it caused her sorrow. She had, as she thought, one consolation—*he* did not know of it. She felt if he should ever find it out, she must sink into the earth, or hide her shame-dyed face, never to lift it more—a feeling arising partly of her exquisite modesty, partly of imperfect knowledge of him.

For days after their settling in Brighton she avoided with all her strength the chance of a meeting with him, and even sought to persuade her father to permit her to visit some distant relatives; but Mr. Evelyn was inexorable, and expressed his displeasure upon thus being pressed.

It was quite true Constance had often been at the Hall; she had there passed the blissful dream-time of her life. In those days, before ever trouble and sorrow and humiliation had broken him upon the wheel of stern suffering, Lionel Travers was (with his charm of refined manner, his beauty of person, his grace of intellect and genius, and the tenderness inseparable from the man), of all with whom she could possibly have been thrown in contact, the very being who would impress her by outward influence.

And he, who had always treated her as the petted girl companion of his wife and playmate of his child, experienced honest pleasure without a thought of harm when she was with them; and as he would have loved a little sister of his wife's, he welcomed her sunny presence gladly as an additional charm to home and the fireside circle, or to the quiet summer evening's roaming for ferns; so he loved the girl well, and later on saw no cause to prevent his proving the friend of her father. And there was a touch of homesickness about that invitation to the curacy, the yearning to look on the old face of a friend—of one, *the* one, of all that had known him then. There was hunger to hear that gentle girl talk lovingly of his; there was the faintness and weariness so often attendant upon a great purpose, when one feels it impossible to go on and adhere to the line marked out without something that shall refresh by its olden memory. It is a human need, and often an absolute necessity; and when Robert Evelyn came to Brighton it was a sincere pleasure to the Minister.

When Westley Garland found the girl avoided him he was, at first, much hurt; this also he did not show. Then he said to himself, "She is growing older, and this is mere maidenly reserve—the exquisite quality which is so marked in Constance." And he waited; the timidity natural under the circumstances would pass. He knew the touching reverence with which she had looked up to him in the past; in his present position this would be augmented.

As the waves of wheat ears shake from them the evening sun, stirred by the low winds of hot July days, murmuring along hidden ridges of cool earth, or as broad belts of the sea rear themselves to the flood of light, while swift, hot currents circle and eddy about their strong, deep bosoms, so did the pure love of this innocent flower from Arcadia dally with the thought and the musing that were so precious, yet of which she was all afraid. Those shadows! those shadows! Flitting across her picture, not as mere sleepy rests, but shading, casting roseate color into dense relief; and even the color on her picture at times taking weird and irregular and inharmonious twisting, with red entering a miniature arena for a joust with black, while the tilting of blue, of green, and of yellow was out of its order completely. The picture became very overcast, what with this and its shading, so that poor little Constance was troubled, vastly troubled. She had not learned of her sex the art of holding hues or emotions in supreme control; for was she not motherless, sisterless, none of womankind at hand with invaluable teaching, no too-sagacious girl friend to enlighten? All alone, nursing her fancies like so many hot-house flowers, and half afraid of these, being unversed in botany, and aware by instinct only of pretty things that sting or poison.

Then, like stars or points of hushed intensity, there were the joyous recollections: old memories and recalled times of quiet delight passed in his society and that of his dear wife. There had been the converse by sweet sound on autumn evenings, when she had played the accompaniment to his richly modulated voicing of old hymns, and when Ella's voice had joined with hers in musical praise. Such seasons were dearer to both husband and wife than those grand visiting evenings, when the *élite* of the neighborhood assembled in their rooms, and Eagle Hall for the time lost its customary serenity.

Even now Constance had the enjoyment of the Sabbath, and would steal into his church all unobserved, and hang upon his utterance. She would ever remember that first occasion of hearing him in the pulpit. Until then she had never known the man, nor realized his power, but from then he was a being of yet higher and more exalted nature, and her reverence increased, whatever her love might be. She had not been in the least surprised to find that their friend had entered upon a clerical life; it had often been the topic of his expressed wish for the future. But Constance had been marvellously surprised to learn not only that Mrs. Travers was not resident with him under his new name and in his affluence, but that the unfortunate lady and her little girl had altogether disappeared. It was curious, and Miss Evelyn puzzled her pretty head over it while at needle-work until the pretty head ached.

The curate and his daughter were as surprised as any one at the suddenness with which all had been brought about, for the goods were removed by strangers without commotion and with great haste. They had visited Mrs. Travers two or three times, but had seen that their friend desired to be alone with her grief, and calling one day, it was to find the place stripped, and their friends gone no one knew whither. It was brought painfully to mind that first Sunday morning upon which Constance heard the Minister preach, when his text, taken from the fourth chapter of Lamentations, was that pathetic refrain, "*They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets.*" The full power of moving the heart, of which he was so consummate a master, was never evidenced with more touching eloquence than in that discourse; and to Constance, who knew all that his heart was full of, it was doubly so. Yet was its pathos not oppressive, rather yielding a fragrance that rejoices: if one accepted the workmanship for its beauty it was necessary to accept the casket for its essence, neither being worthy without the other. And while walking homeward there came to mind the words of her father's favorite poet:

"I went to listen to my teacher friend.
O Friend above, thanks for the friend below!
Who having been made wise, deep things to know,
With brooding spirit over them doth bend,
Until they waken words, as wings, to send
Their seeds far forth, seeking a place to grow."

A day or two afterward, when Mr. Garland met Robert Evelyn, he told him he was in a little difficulty about his house at Hawkingdean—his favorite house, by-the-way—a species of hermitage to which the overtaxed student retired for his sole seasons of leisure. The housekeeper had been summoned to the sick-bed of her daughter in Wales; might be absent some little time; he esteemed the woman, and wished to keep the situation open for her, but it would be inconvenient; the Minister's poor would suffer; the system of charity he had organized would be thrown out of order.

Then Mr. Evelyn said—

"If you can put up with her inexperience, Constance shall go; she is a capital little housekeeper, though I say it, and I am sure, if she once gets in the way of it, will supply Mrs. Mellerton's place very well."

"I think this offer most kind," said Mr. Garland. He did, but for the moment thought not of the young lady herself, except as recalling those fern gatherings and carol singings. Yes, he thought the offer kind, and said so. Equally guileless the curate jogged homeward, and was met on the mat by his carefully trained daughter, to whom, stooping, he gave a very affectionate kiss, and—"Piece of good luck for you, my dear; extraordinary chance of distinguishing yourself; first step in life! Always remember your poor father's precepts, and keep your dear mother's ensample before you. Lock the tea-caddy after going to it; clean paper the bottoms of your cupboards; be sure and have all the corners of the rooms well swept out; see that the servants wipe their shoes; look all round the last thing at night; and, above all, keep the place very quiet. I'm exceedingly delighted; opportunity of proving the Evelyns are not ungrateful; happy coincidence, that daughter in Wales; ought not to say so either, but it's most extraordinary, that it is!"

The well-meaning curate paused; and interested, surprised, and fluttering, his daughter inquired of him the meaning of the odd address; she hoped it held out a promise of her being enabled to quit Brighton, so she awaited his explanation with eagerness.

"Briefly, my dear, I've a comfortable, responsible, lady-like situation in view for you, upon which you will be required to enter to-morrow, and in which I hope you will prove yourself worthy of your father's precepts and your mother's ensample."

"I will try to do so, papa dear!" winding her arms about him very lovingly. "I have always been your own good, obedient, dutiful little girl, have I not?"

"You have, my child, thanks to careful bringing up, and I hope will always continue to prove so!"

"Well, papa, what is it, and where? Not in Brighton, I hope?"

"Not in Brighton."

"Then I am willing to take it, wherever it is, whatever it may be;" and in the intensity of her relief she literally hugged her far-seeing parent.

"You promise me this very faithfully, Constance?"

"Most faithfully, papa!" cried his daughter, eagerly.

"Caught!" said Robert Evelyn to himself, highly rejoiced; and aloud, "It is to keep our friend Mr. Garland's country house at Hawkingdean during the temporary absence of his housekeeper; perhaps, if you are scrupulously careful, *altogether*."

Gradually the arms released their hold, but she still leaned upon him, and her beautiful head fell heavily to his shoulder. There was no other movement, and, looking on the slant, he could see that her face was very white. Then he turned, encircling her, and supported the frail burden, inanimate and powerless; she had fainted.

"Bless my soul!" cried Robert Evelyn; "this is most extraordinary!" He had not heard the door softly opened; the intruder stepped forward at a stride, deeply solicitous.

"Don't be alarmed—understand these faintings—retired medical man—tremendous practice. Shut the door, please—pass me a footstool; now, something cold, letter-weight over there do very well—bring her to in a jiffy—painful spectacle—father's heart—look another way, please; so, so, coming round—presence of mind every thing. Turn the cat out, shut her in the yard—can't have squalling in the passage. Glad I called—just in time—shut the door again as you go out."

The singular visitor, whom Mr. Evelyn remembered to have called once before, had a knee on the footstool, a foot on the floor, and, supporting the slight form with true professional regard, had, as he said, brought her round. So much recovered was his patient, that, as the door closed upon Mr. Evelyn (covering the cat's head with his coat tail to prevent its remonstrance during transit), she was entirely conscious, and released herself, very much embarrassed.

"Don't be put out, my dear; I am your friend, and old enough to be your father. Know your secret—don't be ashamed of it—have a little chat first opportunity. Accept this offer; why not? Best friend of his poor wife's; left the country—mistaken, I think; but, however—queer sex—by all means keep his house, look after him—it's your duty—no wrong attached; always stick to your instincts—they point to Hawkingdean; the poor man wants somebody faithful and attentive; hard world this for the widower—widower myself, very much so—hired people selfish, negligent—don't look after one's comfort, every thing to a literary man. Take my advice—study his comfort—he deserves it; noble man—wonderful: obey your father—wishes are law—good father, I'm sure!"

The retired medical man had heard the good father enter, and *he* heard the liberal commendation of himself. He advanced to thank the opportune visitor, who, like Asmodeus, always seemed turning up in the nick of time; while Constance, startled, half frightened, and certainly bewildered, rising and staggering a little, asked permission to withdraw. The ex-disciple of Æsculapius himself opened the door for the fair child, and contrived to intercept her downcast glance, conveying a swift look full of meaning as a cunningly worded telegram. Then he returned and took the seat Mr. Evelyn had placed for him by the fire.

"Charming daughter, yours—I have a charming daughter—let us shake hands; we have not yet done so."

They did so, Mr. Evelyn thinking the gentleman the most singular person he had ever encountered; but then he knew Brighton was not like Torquay, that the inhabitants are cosmopolitan, and, probably, the callers upon the clergy as diversified as in any sphere of ministerial labor upon which a man could enter. When the stranger called upon Mr. Evelyn in the first instance it was to congratulate him upon coming to Brighton, to make his acquaintance, to wish him long and continued success in his new field of labor, to offer his friendly services, to invite him to call now and then with Miss Evelyn at Regina Cottage, and to hint that a pretty good donation to local charities would create a very favorable impression upon the minds of the public. Of this Mr. Barnard undertook the disbursement, to save, as he said, Mr. Evelyn's losing invaluable time peddling about ascertaining the most worthy, and the new curate was there and then mulct in two £5 notes, for which he was a very great fool doubtless; but let any one try first the sensation of entering the most popular church in Brighton as a co-helper in the work of the ministry, and next the peculiar experience of being called upon by Mr. Noel Barnard, who was no ordinary ambassador, and all wonder will cease.

"Thought I'd just look in to see how you were getting on; think it the duty of the parishioners; great fault of the present day stand-offishness, pastorate aloof from the people, people aloof from the pastorate; glad to know you, pleased to see you looking so well, very."

And the visitor nodded good-humoredly, although a degree patronizingly, to the new curate. Somehow, somewhere, from somebody, the Rev. Robert Evelyn had heard that Brighton was chiefly peopled with doctors who were practicing and doctors who had done practicing; this was evidently one of the latter, in all probability a man of weight and substance. A little old, certainly, but then so much the more safe. Dear Constance was growing up; if any thing happened to himself, the world was a cold place; one could not make a friend too many in the interests of the young and those depending upon one. Mr. Evelyn received the visitor's friendly advances and gracious sociableness with the good manners he considered becoming in a curate who had not saved, not inherited, and was not expecting that which is called by people of the free seats, the "needful."

"I agree with you, Mr. Barnard, that a more fraternal spirit might exist. It is our duty to smooth each other's paths and lighten each other's burdens."

"Well, I've tried to live up to that myself, but it's such a precious ungrateful world! Did it ever strike you so? And I've found so many people about 'who are not what they seem,' as the poet says; can't make it out. Who are you and who am I, and who's the other fellow? It's like being in a ship's hold full of Dutch cheeses in a storm. Takes me all my time to make people out."

Mr. Evelyn began to feel slightly uncomfortable; there was a something about this person, with all his free and agreeable manner, which the plain-going clergyman did not half like.

"It is quite certain, Sir, the world is overfull of deceptive persons. I mean those it is difficult for an honest man to fathom."

With great solemnity the visitor laid a hand upon the other's arm, and said, gravely, "It's positively awful! One of these days there'll be an explosion, I know, to make more room for the honest ones."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LADY LINDON'S FAREWELL RECEPTION.

The season had drawn to its close. It wanted sixteen days to Christmas. Those of London and the counties were departing, and ere long there would be a great blank in Brighton society.

There was some excitement astir: Lady Lindon would hold her last reception of the season, and it was rumored the lion would be there. If so, it would be no slight honor, for Westley Garland had been invited every where, and had been nowhere; he did not go into society, although so essentially fitted for it. But it somehow became talked of in select circles that he would be at this reception, and it was looked upon as an event, although people were not so very much surprised that he should go to Lady Lindon's, for somehow there had been a little mixing up of their names. Nobody quite knew how it had come about, but their names had been generally coupled when one or other was under discussion.

Lady Lindon troubled herself as little as possible previous to receiving her guests: a reception was as cool a piece of custom as resuming the family name after a catastrophe. People were exceedingly glad to have the opportunity once more of curiously noting her ladyship's residence, which they strolled over with the delighted expectancy one might suppose they would display in prying into the mysterious chambers of some barbaric chieftain. They knew so many ordinary people, all possessed of the approved elegant drawing and reception rooms—not a pin to choose between them, as though the furnishing of interiors was stereotyped. A visit to Lady Lindon was a new sensation; it revived after the sickening uneventful insipidity of customary polite attention. And it was as Lady Comdarlington said, "One met so many nice people there, whom one never seemed to meet any where else; such talented souls; the class that do not care for visiting, and are very difficult to draw out of their shells; the thoughtful men and women whom somehow we miss altogether; a little peculiar, I grant you, but eminently interesting."

The prestige of Lady Lindon's *réunions* certainly culminated upon the report circulating that the Minister would be present. "By which is meant, I suppose," ventured the Honorable Mrs. Glover, "if he can quit the sick-bed of one of the lower orders. I do think, dear, there should be some law to control valuable people like Westley Garland, who are certainly raised up for the special behoof of people in society, not to waste valuable time fiddle-faddling about among the lower vulgar."

"He is such a darling!" murmured the countess, lusciously, as though he were a pomegranate and exquisite to the taste.

"I never knew an instance," said Miss Glover, "of one petted by the *élite* as he is having so ordinary and gross a taste."

"I won't have you say a word against my hero, a duck of a man. Ah! if you but knew his value, could realize the bliss of his being unmarried, and— You know what I mean."

The countess languidly fanned herself. Her charming friend coldly replied, "Pray don't talk nonsense, dear! This person is all very well, and undoubtedly clever; but plain *Mrs.* would never please mamma, you know, so what is the use of talking of it? Granted the wife of a man as talented, what position does that confer in society? And you know mamma thinks so much of that. The glory and lustre are all enshrined about the male creature, and, as a rule, I think the wives of these glorious and lustrous male creatures have an uncommonly hard time of it, a reflected light being at best but a chilly sort of radiance."

"Well, I declare you are growing quite cynical; your mamma must spare you to come and stay a while with us. I will try if I can not persuade you into seeing that there is many a gem of a man who does not sport his panelled quartering. But now tell me what you are going to wear at Lady Lindon's?" When converse wandered into this channel, there was harmony.

The people who have a penchant for the unique were especially glad to have again the opportunity of viewing the interior of her ladyship's unconventional abode. And it was considered a shame that the splendid flowers of her conservatory should bloom and drop their gorgeous blossom broadcast and unseen except by the haughty mistress, who, for all they knew, might be scampering the Pyrenees with an alpenstock when next the Brighton season came round.

How the Minister came to give consent was in this wise. Compliant with his wish, her ladyship had called upon Lady Ellerby; it was a mission peculiarly objectionable to the first-named lady, but she performed her part with a grace and tact a less sensitive, less pain-disciplined, one would have failed in altogether. And Lady Ellerby was susceptible to this; at once recognized it to be no inquisitive, hollow, mock sentimental visit, but one of deep import, dictated by a very high purpose, and Lady Ellerby experienced the gratitude none of womankind more genuinely feel than the young wife who fears herself to be neglected by her husband, and is visited by a friend of her own sex for the express purpose of dealing in a straightforward manner with the difficulty, and of smoothing the little ruggednesses which are such stumbling-blocks upon the path. Simultaneously Westley Garland proceeded to town, and found out the artistic retreat of the lordly painter. His acquaintance with that individual was of the brief kind; but, as we know, he thought favorably of the truant. Lord Ellerby received the Minister with unfeigned pleasure, and when he opened his business with his own natural delicacy, Lord Ellerby laughed with frank delight. That people should have been busy with his name, *his*, the most erratic wanderer and roving Bohemian that ever pencilled the water torrents of Norway or pine-clothed crags of the Tyrol, so upset his equilibrium he enjoyed the idea as he only could enjoy such a situation. "I should very much like to assist these people's kind inquiry, but unfortunately the lovely objects of my protection have vanished, as such always do, and left not a kiss behind. So there isn't great cause for apprehension, Mr. Garland. I am a student and disciple of nature, you must know, and care not much the form it take, so the form be beautiful. All the same, I am aware of a cultured class who, while admiring the sculpturesque in art and poetry, will not tolerate the artistic and poetic in sculpture. Such would denounce my idealism of the beautiful while extolling the result of that idealism; and I have no patience to argue the question with this elegant division of critics. But now come and see for yourself, and tell me, could *you* have permitted such lovely children to have passed from you unlimned? They will be an ever-present pleasure to me." Saying this, he revealed the studies where, alone and in company, the children of Lady Lindon figured with telling effect; it was the Minister's first introduction to the pair whose story was so romantic and unfortunate. Their story, as told by his lordship, aroused the interest of this investigator of human sorrow and misfortune, and he said, "The whole affair is so exceptional and worthy of further inquiry, the suddenness of their departure ought not, I think, to be laid aside so dispassionately." "Well, there is not much difficulty," answered his lordship, "in discovering what has become of them; one has gone into Yorkshire, the other we should find, doubtless, at the farmer's." When Mr. Garland returned to Brighton it was not to forget either face, thanks to the skill of the artist. And Lord Ellerby bore with him, a day or two later, miniatures of the engaging pair as a gift for Flora. Detailing the result of his quest to Lady Lindon, Mr. Garland said, "As you wished, I have delivered an invitation to your reception on the 16th; his lordship returns to-morrow, and will come to present his duty to your ladyship." She smiled. "I want one other guest to crown my pleasure—my ambassador: you will come?" giving him her hand graciously. "I will try; but you know I am an uncertain being."

It soon became known that Lord Ellerby would be there, and it was a source of gratification, that young noble being a general favorite, and having been so long abroad. He went to and fro, from his place in Paris to Florence, where he had a delicate arbor-like cottage, blown or trailed together from a dream of his, and where he painted fantastic studies for the churches without reward, save the inward pleasure derived from the giving; and the pleased Florentines, without clashing the English milord with their old Angelicos and Botticellis, would hang his saintly heads in dim lady chapels, where devout peasants, themselves more fair, would kneel much moved by the haunting eyes whereto they prayed.

Upon the evening of the reception the mansion was agleam with lights and the glittering adjuncts of a splendid entertainment. Away in a back-room, sitting at a little table of brown wood, upon which he leaned an elbow, was Lord Darrell, disturbed by the commotion. It was one of the nights he dreaded—one of the public nights; he avoided them, crept right away out of the domain of racket and noise. House-cleaning sends some sensitive folk nearly out of their mind; in this instance it was the reception of company; his lordship hated it. He was left to himself; not a soul went near unless he rang for them, and he would sit with his elbow on the table, looking musingly into the fire, immovable for long periods, "slowly forming" upon the geologic principle. But upon this particular night Lord Darrel somehow became restless and irascible. He heard carriage after carriage dash up, name after name announced; heard indication of the large assembly moving in the state-rooms, and later on heard music. It set him quivering, affected his nerves; he seemed to wish to join the throng, and literally saw no reason why he should not; experienced the desire to interchange a word or two with old cronies who possibly might be present, and with whom he used to be akin in politics. He would go down. He did go down, scratching furtively at the fringe of tawny whisker, and looking timorously from the corners of his eyes. It was a scene of great magnificence which met his bewildered gaze; his queenly daughter, more magnificent than all, was seated upon a species of dais at the far end. So many brilliant beings intervened, his lordship could not summon resolution to penetrate so far; and after unavailing attempts to discover some eye that would meet his own with kindness in it, or a face that would turn to him with friendliness, he gave it up, glided over to the wall and the shelter of an alcove, where, upon a settee, he devoted himself to nursing one of his legs on the other, interlacing his hands over his knee, and watching the pageant from beneath his pent brows. He was the subject of ridicule and satirical comment, he knew. That insulting patrician vulgarism, the eyeglass, was lifted to inspect the strange being while passing, and he felt it, but he did not stir, foolishly perhaps thinking he had as good a right there as most other people. It was considered, or tacitly admitted, to be not quite the thing to recognize his lordship, and no one did so. Society assembled to recognize a lion, and to notice this decidedly foxy-looking individual would have been very bad form. Society has not agreed to be saddled with the fathers and other intrusive relatives and followers of those it encrowns and enthrones.

Until the lion of the evening arrived, the correct thing seemed to be, pressing forward for a word with Lady Lindon. Consummate elegance, cold and sad grace, marked her ladyship's reception of her guests. They had not noticed it before, but it was now remarked that her ladyship wore dress mourning; it was pronounced highly becoming, but for whom had the freak taken her to mourn? The majority of people settled it to their satisfaction by supposing that, having exhausted every color upon earth, her ladyship had now fallen back upon this sombre splendor, and had accomplished a distinct success. It was merely a court robe of French gray satin, over which were aerial clouds of black silk gauze confined by a delicate tracery of jet; a fall of lace and jet over the bare shoulders, a large cross of jet upon the bosom, where a chaste spray of white flowers was secured by a diamond brooch; a tiara of great magnificence, one of her Indian toys, consisting of regal diamonds, surrounded the haughtily borne head: from this a long and graceful fall of corresponding tulle or gauze; upon the right arm a highly chased bracelet of jet, entwining a circle of diamonds; a rich yet unassuming costume, and, for Lady Lindon, very much within bounds.

But the lion was late. Society hoped it was not to be disappointed; meantime contented itself with lionizing Lord Ellerby, who was every where, all over the place. He enjoyed a word here and a word there before people had time to tire him, and he kept up a running play of amusing remark which made his breaking in upon the several dull groups a mutual pleasure.

"Some choice stories afloat about you, Ellerby! What have you been up to? Assure you, if you don't mend, you'll get black-balled!"

It was the Earl of Comdarlington, a great dandy; having a piquant piece of scarlet bloom in his coat, and an infinite drawl that was mildly irritating.

"Would your lordship really like to know?"

"I should, 'pon honor! Devil of a nuisance to lose a fellow like yourself for so long a time!"

"I thought so; that is why I came back. Well, I've been decorating my summer-house."

And the handsome artist-lord was off before the exquisite had time to reply. Gay, chatty, full of anecdote, with bits of cynical merriment, sharp, harmless, glittering as the corners of crystals; primed with the latest art news from every capital in Europe, distributing delicious sprigs of gossip until every group had a little posy of their own, well informed on all forth-coming dramatic, operatic, and literary events also, Lord Ellerby was every where the life and soul of the party. But with all this he was the last to satisfy scandal or feed personal gossip—and especially relative to himself; he would as soon have thought of troubadouring the sunny lays of Baudelaire, De Musset, Gautier, or Béranger, as to enter into conversation upon matters of delicacy with the exquisitely perfumed earl. "Genius," says Carlyle, "has privileges of its own; it selects an orbit for itself; and be this never so eccentric, if it is indeed a celestial orbit, we mere star-gazers must at last compose ourselves; must cease to cavil at it."

Lord Ellerby preferred, with a haughty yet affable ease, to rely upon his privileges, and any cavillers were regarded with a nonchalance that was eminently provoking, yet eminently curative. This courtly painter, follower of no modern school, not from contemptuous indifference, but that his erratic fancy luxuriated where it would, spelled but one language upon the canvas—the idealism of the Beautiful. He painted not for gold, fame, honor, and applause, but for the supreme pleasure it afforded himself; thus, when his peers stepped forward with their criticism, it was one of those impertinences prudently brushed aside with a flutter of his handkerchief, and forgotten instantly. A message quivered upon his canvas—the message which rendered the gorgeous Florentines and Lombardians magnificent; Color as an expression, Loveliness as an idealism. It can not be said that he followed in the steps of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, or Guido, because he followed in no steps; but the license of these masters in regard to color and form was his special feature. One day Lady Lindon said to him, "What curious studies you paint! neither classical nor modern—an odd commingling of both!"

"Ay, I like these conceits; they are antidote to the prosaic. I never could darken my stage with faces like flashes of light broken upon dull bronze, a dense purple air that seems heavy with sad and weary hearts, when one can well-nigh hear the fall of a rain of tears, while around lie the burned-out ashes of pleasure; I don't care for it! Cupids and Sylphs gathering daffodils near Hampstead Heath, if you like, only by all means let us have the Cupids and Sylphs; and I think it's a shame only setting them down as the painters do in Thessalian groves, Elysian meadows, Hesperian gardens, or on Olympian heights. But you shall see my latest piece of extravagance."

"I shall be very pleased."

"Thought in my pictures is not a cold spirit that stands still and requires grasping by other spirit-thought, without which it is lifeless and loveless; a frozen mysticism, fantastic, dim, and dreamy; a warmth-yielding essence, maybe, but needing the wooing of an outer warmth to give back glow for glow. My fancies rather spring upon one, at least they do upon me; quit their dead thralldom to live in our company, and, like cherished memories of the long ago, live with us hauntingly."

Yes; she acknowledged the truth of it when the picture was unveiled before her, and the pretty pair seemed to start to life and spring upon her, as might eager children yearning to be taken to a mother's heart. Truly had he said the memories live with us hauntingly; and these, with their exquisite reality and passionate reminder, dwelt in her very heart. It was with deep interest that she heard his story of the coming and the going, the flitting through the woods of doves, the idyllic romance fallen like an autumn poem, and how the bower of pine wood had now lost the power to charm. It was with new and singular emotion that her ladyship gazed upon the picture, forgetting all else in that spell of rekindled maternal love. A flood of ruddy golden light; a luscious fruit-heavy languor of autumn days; the flutter of birds, the flash of butterflies, with wings like the fall of bejewelled leaves; mossed trunks of rare old apple-trees; the sun setting through the boughs like a flush of gems behind Italian vineyards; and a trellis of lovely flowers, which the artist never hesitated to throw in every where, altogether regardless of the unities; this was the picture, and there, reclining, were the children, not garbed after the precedent of to-day, but with as unwonted freedom as though come down from Zeuxis or Apelles.

In her ladyship's sleeping apartment, upon a small table near to the silk and lace curtains of her couch, were two articles dear beyond all price to their owner: a slender vase, white, beautiful, wherein some dead lilies, there since a tiny hand gathered them and set them therein beside her bed, to woo by this infantine delicacy a caress from the mother, insensible as marble then, but the shedder of passionate floods of tears before the emblem since. Somehow a fillet of autumn leaves seemed to encircle the vase while she looked upon it through her tears after that episode of the picture; and she opened a little book beside it, a mere child's picture-book, but God only knew how dear, between the leaves of which were pressed pale primroses, and one little flower once blue as those pretty eyes that sought it, when one day it had been brought to her and laid lovingly upon her knee.

And the painting haunted her, she could not tell why, but those lovely faces lingered as none had ever done before; and, for the first time in her life, she asked a favor—

"Give me your painting."

He had no copy of it; it was dear to him; he loved those pretty ones it idealized; it was a struggle, parting with the valued piece of work, yet it was like him to say, smilingly—

"With much pleasure."

Fair was the scene presented that night of the reception, and society was represented as it alone is upon these exceptional occasions, when English girls and matrons bouquet themselves into glowing groups of color, with laughter just one note above a ripple, and conversation in that rich repose, the especial trait of the well-bred, or stroll the rooms with a grace that seems regulated by the music. Some of the old people make up a kind of rubber in odd corners, remote from the music, where they talk scandal between the passing of the notables. One or two of the dowagers gather their lace close and go quietly off to sleep, from which they awaken cold and cross, to complain that the harps seem sadly out of tune. The old lords sit stock-still, looking hard at one another, and discussing politics as though each were the presiding governor of a universe. The people who have been about are in full force, and tell graphically how their carriage broke down on one of the Apennine roads, of being overtaken by a great storm while driving from Geneva, or of the upset upon Lucerne; how they had to shelter the last new travelling extravagance from Worth in a Bernese herdsman's hut; and how the Bass was utterly undrinkable at a picnic outside Carlsruhe. A largeness of luxury and comfortable ease characterized these travelling records, the prevalent opinion being, as the cynical Comdarlington preferred to put it, "What on earth is the use of entering upon the fatigue of existence if things are not to be made comfortable for one?" Testy old gentlemen are there, who love the coaches and hate the railways. They are great cronies, and to this day treasure in old drawers high stocks, brass buttons, knee-breeches, and gaiters, believing the good old times will return, and that they will die in them. They invite to their rook-haunted manorial acres with the large-hearted hospitality of fine old English gentlemen. They look out of place at this gay gathering, and when one of the new school scrutinizes them through an eye-glass, much as Belzoni examined the venerable Egyptian beetles, they close up and proudly talk of the past. There is the inevitable coterie whose ideas are bounded by the course, and they are very conversational upon the race; they have Goodwood fresh in recollection; they know a great deal of Goodwood, from its erection as a hunting-seat by the son of Charles the Second. They are loud in praise of the course, which they vote the finest in the kingdom, and the Park, with its stately cedars of Lebanon, to say nothing of the ornamental woods upon the forty acres of grounds around the house. Their lady friends join with enthusiasm in the praise, the recognized walk of our day possessing unrivalled fascination. There is an old duke who carelessly joins the Goodwood coterie; a prince upon turf, the father of his club, a spirit of old chivalrous days which lent to beauty its hand through cloud and sunshine, took its snuff from delicately porcelained trifles, and bowed to a woman but fought a man to the death for a slur on the honor of a friend. He will gracefully vie with a Lennox or a Berkeley in the point of anecdote, and will tell you the history of county sport from its founder downward; he is intimate with the origin of the great meetings, possesses records of 1710, when Parkhurst established Epsom, and of 1727, when Ascot was popular with the Duke of Cumberland, and of 1776, when Colonel St. Leger started the Doncaster. Farther back than these he has the story of venerable Newmarket, which Charles the Second, a liberal patron of the turf, supported in 1667. The Duke of Mainwaring, of the "Four-in-hand Club," is a recognized authority, and they listen to his pleasant chatter with polite attention. The duchess is there, and, next to Lady Lindon, is the most elegant woman in the rooms. Her ladyship is of advanced years, but possessed of infinite majesty;

her silver hair imparts dignified beauty to a head that, in its day, was very haughtily borne, but now is surpassingly graceful without haughtiness.

Naturally talk ran upon the coming lion. An aged lord, himself an author of past fame, bestowed a word of praise upon this favorite of a later day. "That last book of his will live! Admirable! Your servant, my lady!" with the old Court bow while the duchess extended her hand, then shaking hands with the duke, tapping a massive snuff-box, a souvenir of some monarch: and while the two interchanged the old-school courtesy the duchess turned to a friend, and the ladies were soon discussing the possible and hoped-for coming of the popular preacher. An old lady near, with a Holbein-like complexion, and a fabric of lace, snow-drops, and diamonds hiding the scalp from the criticism of the irreverent, who had been calmly sleeping, hearing something about a minister, awoke in a tremor, murmuring one of the responses in the Litany, evidently under the apprehension that she had fallen asleep in church.

The ideas concerning the institution known as Mr. Garland's Church were curious; a prevailing conviction seemed to be that it was a beautiful sanctuary where little indiscretions were extracted from the *élite*, made into patchwork, and given to the poor; where perfumed gloves dallied with ivory-bound church services, or fans fluttered a sort of patronizing approval of the rhythmical measure in David's Psalms; where delicate little bonbons might be taken from exquisite satin bags and sucked in concert with the music, while more energetic people stood up to sing; and where they could at leisure enjoy that rare and perfect gift of eloquence so distinctively their Minister's. Every one quite expected a word and smile when he appeared upon this scene, and flowers nestling among lace upon quick-beating bosoms were sadly fluttered with expectancy. It was getting late; the queenly hostess cast anxious glances toward those doors whereby he would enter; Lady Comdarlington whispered to the Hon. Mrs. Glover, "If he doesn't come, he shall be my 'duck of a man' no longer." A terrible contingency that would, probably, have brought the Minister from the remotest ends of the earth. The Hon. Mrs. Glover was equally attached, but in a different way. As the champion of woman's rights she appreciated the man who was known to be so tender and so true a friend to her sex. A sort of panic spread as time went on; he would not surely enter thus late. The enterprising Lord Leech told Lady Jane, his sister and coadjutor, that his opinion was the man was doing it to cause a sensation. "He is very vain, as you know, and most peculiar. I met an old lady once who positively assured me she'd seen him drinking hot elder wine with an Italian peasant in the crater of Vesuvius. For my part, I don't believe in the fellow; antecedents too doubtful." "Excuse me," said a voice near, with politeness, "her ladyship does not generally open her doors to those whose antecedents are not known and approved." And as though having said no more than a passing compliment, Lord Ellerby glided on, threading his way toward the entrance, where, unannounced and unassumingly, the lion had made his way through the crowd, and with a kind inclination of the head to people known to him, proceeded at once to pay his respects to her ladyship, with a cordial grasp of the hand for Lord Ellerby as he passed. And hostess Empress Helen descended from her dais to him; met him half-way with graceful condescension. "How good of you!" she murmured. "I should have been here before," he explained, apologetically, "but one of my poor people is terribly prostrate; it is doubtful if a messenger would have quite filled the province I have been happily engaged in." "And that?" "Keeping the children quiet while the poor woman slept; there is so much in sleep." "Ever charitable, how good you are! But I must not monopolize you, or my guests will be envious." He bowed, she returned to her seat. There was a flutter of expectation. Where would he make for, which group favor with his notice? Straight across to that alcove in the wall, where sheltering curtains almost obscured the old Lord Darrel. Not so obscured but that his tender eye detected him, understood it; and before the courtly crowd he crossed over, warmly took the thin hand no one had taken, seated himself beside the nobleman society had ignored, and with soft pleasantness of manner sought to woo his interest by conversation. Society shrugged its shoulders, sincerely pitying his taste. Lady Lindon turned a degree paler; the action to her afforded a severe reproach. Wits and beauties alike were much put out; old dowagers were of opinion it indicated plebeian origin, and the extreme superficiality of his gifts. The Earl of Comdarlington looked with astonishment at the pair through his glass, and muttering, "Good gracious! 'Pon honor now!" finically pursued his fragrant way. Lord Darrell's appreciation of the Minister's notice was excessive. The latter remained a very short time, but devoted the best part of it to the slighted nobleman.

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CHAPTER XXV.

AT HAWKINGDEAN—LIFE IN A DOWNLAND VILLAGE.

Within a hollow of the South Downs nestles a quaint little village of perfect Arcadian type. An old-world, dream-life sort of place, with red brick cottages showing well the roofs Mr. Ruskin deems so essential to a picture, and having much drapery of ivy and other creepers lustrous according to the season; with great clustering of foliage, shrubs, and evergreens, and all down the village street a line of wide-spreading trees, between which peep the small shops with breaks of a farm or two, and at the end a church; and with the beautiful amphitheatre of downland, ridges of chalk, the close clean turf, flocks, and their shepherds dozing the idle hours away. Near by the church stands a large rambling old place that seems to have weathered many a generation of pastors and people. It is the parsonage, just the resting-place a peace-loving, humble-minded servant of the Cross might rejoice in, all the air about it breathing of devotion and brotherly love. Within were large and lofty chambers; but some of these, as the long years rolled by, became so crowded with literary treasures—volumed minds of long ago—that their space was largely taken up and filled and stocked with comfortable-looking lines of books wooing one confidently to many an hour's quiet study. The owner of this fair domain is an old man of stately mien, white-haired, benign, gentle of manner, considerate of all, A generation has he labored in this still sphere, his youth and ardor cooling with the years, until now the life is a calm, the service a repose. He is much revered and loved in the village; he had known these big and brawny Southerners as babies, had seen those tall women when pretty-toed paddlers on yonder beach, but he had seen little change in the ancient downs, and none in stick or stone of the quiet village.

Roaming for violets one comes upon it unawares; sheltered in the cleft of the weald, it seems to have retreated hither from the vain world, and to be as innocent of the proximity of that gay town and courtly vanity fair, the metropolis of the hills, as though still with the Druids who once held their mystic rites above here.

How the important marts of change and commerce get along it is impossible to tell. When decrease will set in amidst the piles of apples and bottles of bull's-eyes it would be rash to predict. The ploughshare young of the district certainly make a flutter occasionally, and Hobnails and Clumps from the wide tracts of pasture here lay in store for their lonely watching. But these are not all. Round a pond, under the willows, at a sharp angle, as if protecting the retreat from invasion, is stationed the smithy, the awe-inspiring delight of the urchins, who (coming from school over the neighboring hill) congregate at the porch, and gaze timorously in at the Titan. The clink from the anvil is the only sound awakening echo in the village, save when some wagon goes lumbering onward to one of the adjoining homesteads. Fallen among nettles, symbolic of progress in the village, are several old wheels, and the connective trade of a wheelwright is illustrated. The grocery and drapery dépôt is quaint and original: it would be easy, although it would not be kind, to poke fun at the window and doorway where Hoyle's prints and dips struggle for vantage. The little store is accommodating to the cottagers; and as for the gentry—well, the gentry did not deal there in olden times, and now the ledger under the greasy counter has no open account with families of distinction.

These consist of the farmers aforesaid, and the dwellers in three or four villa cottages, a stuccoed, five-window residence that seems to have strayed from Croydon and got lost, a manor-house of Tudor build, and the old mansion known as the Moated Grange. The manor-house lies ahead of the village, screened by the downs, and looking right away to sea from lofty upper windows; it is circled by a belt of trees once rook-haunted. A strange man lives here—a scholar, a student of stars, a lover of nature, a disciple of books; one who walks long reaches of the downland looking upon these olden sweeps of hillock with great love, by starlight and by sunlight a lonely, inwrapped wanderer; sometimes, however, accompanied by his little daughter, a pretty child in the dawn-time of her teens. The silent man and this fair young creature were in high repute with the peasantry, whose wants it was their pleasure to supply. The dark old house secluded in its trees was looked upon with that touching love, seldom found in England, but frequently in France, where some shadowy old château patron-saints the village. The rural poor of the Downland resemble their kind across the Channel in a blind sort of reverence for the priest and the scholar. A volume is a sealed mystery held in due awe, while a student with his book is the incarnation of the Dweller upon the Threshold. In the village we tell of the man with the book was paramount. The very swaying of the trees about his shadowy castle had an occult thoughtfulness. Owls had supplanted the more romantic rooks. At night, when all else was dark from end to end of the valley, timid little ones peeping from their cots saw a light at the big house where a lonely man sat writing, and they loved it, grew to look for it, and because it was ever there it became, despite the denser shadow of the trees, their faith, their polar star. The man had lived long in this village before the prattler came to spell a new and softer science, and now the girl had grown to splendid health by nurture of the Downs, life of these hills drawn in from the first toddling of her tiny feet. Sometimes the student, walking down the slope, would meet the pastor toiling slowly up, his white curls blowing hither and thither, and the good shepherd would pat the little golden fleece and call her the lamb of all his flock, whereat the father would glance half fondly from his book, and with his usual abstraction murmur—

"Nay, friend, *mine*, thank God, and the air on these good hills."

And then he would turn to the book again, while the child, who must love something other than iron erudition, clung to the pillar of the church, which much pleased the patriarch, who would stoop with wondrous tenderness, glancing half enviously at the man with knit brows, who caught his meaning as those in dreams catch strange fancies.

"You love children?—ah!—our Saviour commanded—about 160, Hipparchus it was, precession of equinoxes—so—lost myself. Fine child, Sir, *and mine*, my very own! Ptolemy determined distances, don't you think so? Not a question but was known to the Arabs; so—taking your constitutional? Good, but no book—you are welcome to this, old friend; there is much marrow in it. Nay, I shall not need it; I am bound for home."

Another time when they crossed paths the old man commented on her tenuity, and the father, looking from out the past, said thoughtfully, while trifling with the scattered tresses—

"Ah! her mother was delicate, very; I never saw much of her, but it struck me she was delicate; she went off rather suddenly. If memory serves me, I was deeply engaged at the time on aberration of light of fixed stars; gave me a deal of thought—up there a long time—saw something—imagine she passed me. Beg pardon, take little one home? Thanks, no; she never leaves me; I hope never will."

The pastor always walked on after these encounters with a placid gentleness that well became the venerable man, but beneath which the close observer might have detected a certain grave solicitude which would have aroused speculation.

The silent, secluded scholar had found it well to have his little one always with him; had come down from his stars, and up from his old dead writers, and off from his vast solitude of downland, to the fresh beauty of the fairy prattler, and it was well: that small thing kept human the heart so cobwebbed by learning. She grew up to be the light of the great grim house and garden. In the village the humble folks looked for her coming as for the good genius of their lot, and many a sly admiring glance was watching the pretty form on the hill during those quiet walks.

Although secluded and removed by position and station, the lonely master of the Bishop's House (it was called the Bishop's House, owing to the amiable Edmund Bonner having here resided) was in no degree of proud or forbidding nature; his courtesy was kingly, extended alike to the moneyed parvenu located there for the air, and to the laborer on the land, for whom there was ever a word of dreamy kindness. Perhaps no one realized the advantage of so worthy a neighbor more than the pastor, who enjoyed the privilege of entering the large library at will and of adding to his goodly store of tomes by occasional loans of exceptional volumes. He would drop in about every other morning (no one else ever visited the recluse) without ceremony, as desired by the master, content to find the little daughter playing in the garden or sitting by the fire. At such times something like this would happen.

"Well, lady-bird, waiting for another game at ball? Here goes, then. Ah! you now throw too high for me; let's run and see who catches it."

A race; little one always victor, and such glee. A lozenged lattice, ever so high, would open, and pale papa looking out to chide, but seeing the pastor, would just call down,

"Morning! Very busy; you'll excuse my coming down? Book or two on the study-table you'll like."

And the window would be shut severely, like a clattering protest of the glass against levity, after which they were quieter, went off to the arbor or elsewhere, and made crowns with laurel leaves and other dainty work, while the old man wove the spell of fairy lore. But that face would come to the high window again and again restlessly, as unable to summon resolution to descend and play with the child, yet jealous of another doing so; wondering what had become of them, looking longingly down on the garden, yet shuddering at thought of the noise they made. Then the student would descend, his hands clasped on a book behind his dressing-gown, eyes heavy with last night's vigil, a staid and measured gait, but cordial outholding of the hand to his friend.

Upon one of these occasions, when the child had grown to be a big girl entering upon the first of her teens, the pastor came with a piece of news; and as it was but once in a decade that such was gathered in the village, much was made of the startling rumor. A charming cottage, long untenanted, was let at last. A widow lady and her son had driven over from Brighton, had been prepossessed by the flower-clustered home, and had taken it. To the pastor, to whom every house was like a living being, this was an event of importance; but the scholar heard and soon forgot, when deep in the books and distant with the dead. Not so the girl, to whom it was scarcely less interesting than to the pastor, and whose sympathies were quickly aroused when her friend dwelt on the lady-like yet sad grace of the new tenant, and the pretty manners and gentle speech of her son.

The cottage was prepared, the pastor himself often looking in and giving a hint here and there conducive to the comfort of the coming inmates.

The humble but well-bred occupants arrived upon the appointed day. Of course the village stood on the door-step, and worthy dames stared as they had not done since a real huntsman galloped through. A keen watch was set all day between the bottles of sticky sweets, and boot and stay laces were clustered thicker to admit of a peephole for espionage. The smith dropped a hoof, a thing unknown since his apprentice days. The sexton cast his sharp ferret eyes over his muslin blind, and set to calculating the length of the widow. The farmers' men touched hats with rough courtesy, and their masters eyed the handsome, anxious face of the mother with kindly deference. The farmers' daughters slipped on their garden hats, and took baskets strangely near the pathway palings in quest of straggling roses. The village children, grouped, finger in mouth, seemed transfixed. The aged, basking in the sun flooding their porches, invoked a blessing upon the lady who, they read with instinct rather than dim eyes, had passed through the ordeal of woe.

The pastor, with infinite thoughtfulness, received them in the porch, and the lady's mournful eyes lighted with gratitude at the mark of sociable attention; but that no misunderstanding might arise, she respectfully informed him that they were Dissenters. He would have preferred it otherwise, but took it comfortably, merely remarking there was no place of Congregational worship nearer than Brighton, a great inconvenience, and any time when they cared to drop in at the church, his pew was at their disposal. He was none the less kind and courtly, and was rewarded sometimes upon wet days by seeing the pair the most reverent of all his flock. This was preferable to the course adopted by the master of the Bishop's House, who never went anywhere.

As time passed it was remarked that the new tenants were very retiring. Poor, they lived with economy; it was not convenient to receive people back again, so they did not visit; even the pastor's kindly invitation to tea was declined, with thanks that were deep but diffident.

The boy, like his mother, was possessed of much delicate beauty. Her husband, a Congregational minister worked to death, left nothing but this pale, thoughtful boy of some thirteen years; the mother's slender income was their sole support.

The pastor spoke of them at the Bishop's House, and the student came off Copernicus, heard, and forgot the next moment; but Goldenhair, who had more earth than stars in her composition, became curious.

Strolling upon the downs one day, reading as usual, our student nearly walked over a lady sitting upon a camp-stool. He apologized. "So abstracted—ten thousand pardons—get absorbed in book; dear me—your son? Surely my neighbors—very glad to have met you—good-morning, good-morning." Then, turning back after a few paces, to the lazy boy risen abashed from the sward, "Run in my house whenever agreeable—books you may like—it will be dull here after the town! Morning, your servant, madam!" raising the old worn felt hat with the grace of the *ancienne noblesse*.

They each thought differently of him; the lady reading austere sensitiveness in the nature, the boy a majesty of learning compensating for any sign of brusqueness. The bent form became distant on the ridge of hills, ever the same brooding intentness, the same rapt departure from surroundings; the gaunt form stood on the rim of the circle before descending the slope; the sea, the sky, infinitude, and that singular form in relief.

"How the man must have suffered!" said the lady to herself. "That is no mere love of learning; rather the refuge to which he has flown wounded."

"What are you thinking of, mamma?" asks the boy, stretched again lazily upon the grass, sunset flushing a lance-like bloom upon his cheeks.

"That, after all, we may be dull here. I am not sure that it is well for you."

"But our kind friend has proposed a remedy, dear. What books there must be in that old place! Let us call, mamma."

And he gained his point, as usual; poor fragile refuser, with nothing in all the world to love save this young pleader, and he was her world!

The boy was so enamored of reading that he would not allow a day to elapse without accepting the gracious invitation, and something told him these abstracted ones are apt to forget permissions.

The servant conducted the visitor to the study, vacant at the time, but to which came Golden-hair, with considerable confidence, to see what the boy was like; he might be ill some day, and she have to carry jellies to the cottage; and she found him like—very like—a dim poetic sort of ideal she had taken the trouble to conceive when mixing with the shock-headed youngsters of her sphere of usefulness. A trifle shy, perhaps, but that was becoming, and she had no ideal of a bold boy; he must be gentle of manner, soft of tone, tender of touch; her brusque papa had proved sufficient acquaintance with the other school. She did not know what to say, so said—

"I hope your mamma will like our village."

Whereat the boy, who always spoke the truth, replied with innocent candor—

"Mamma does not like villages. We are here because, being poor, we can live cheaper; neither does mamma like Sussex, but poor papa labored in the county, and mamma will not leave it; he loved it."

"Now, my papa hates every place alike; isn't that dreadful? Except on the top of those windy old hills, and there he seems all right."

The boy came to think the girl very winning, and the village seemed less dull already when seen by the light of this fair young face. Soon they were good friends enough, and her playful words awoke that smile none ever could resist—the old, wonderful smile that, upon the face of his poor dead father, had won the people, making the Word seem sweeter from those lips. And Golden-hair smiled back, when a footstep approached, and the master, with his pale lined face, stood in the doorway, a roll of manuscripts in his hand, a book under his arm, and stooping slightly.

Eying the two from below the shaggy brows he muttered—

"Been here long?"

The salutation was abrupt, but the boy was not taken aback, and answered, quietly and with much respect—

"I have but just come, Sir. My mother's compliments, and she trusts you will forgive the liberty of my calling."

"Ah, certainly; I'm not partial to callers—hate 'em; but, if I remember aright, I said you could just look in. You'd like a book or two? Violet, child, you can run and play. Close the door carefully, my darling, and request the girls to see to that kitchen door; it jars the whole house. They fancy my nerves were made by the smith," to the visitor, while Violet retired with a little expression of regret and admiring adieu glances.

The skeleton knees of the scholar knocked together; he sat back in a high carved chair, clutching at the dressing-gown with convulsive movement; his actions were expressively suggestive of unrest and disquiet. He turned to the boy standing by the table.

"Fond of reading?"

"Very, Sir; my father was a great reader, and taught me to love books. He used to say they would, through life, prove my best and truest friends."

The answer seemed to please the student, who looked at the speaker with new interest.

"So your father liked books? Poor devil! And you take after him? Sorry for you; give it up—take to the plough, counter, desk. Look at these people's rosy cheeks about here; no books, Sir. The happiest-going are those without minds."

Spite of this severe advice, the white hand was unconsciously patting the volumes strewn about the table with a movement more significant than any expressed fondness. At this moment a door somewhere interior closed smartly; the master bounded with a cry—"Bless me!—curse of my life that door-banging. I like the hills—no doors!"

The boy began to feel slightly uncomfortable and nervous himself; he edged a little away from the table.

"Be careful—hat going to tumble!"

The visitor placed his hat in a secure position, and the master, as if coming from out a reverie, continued—

"Father something in the preaching way, I think?"

"A minister, Sir," with cheeks all crimson for the honor of the dead darling, tremulous cadence, downcast eyes, and a shadow upon the beautiful features.

The bookworm noticed it all, but went on with his withering cynicism. The boy was creeping into his heart; he would have none of it, and posted sentinels to guard the musty hermit-niche.

"I suppose, looking after other people's souls, he neglected his own body—more fool he! Clergy want to be web-footed and rhinoceros-skinned in parish districts. Pray be careful with your elbow there, or that book will be down; know nothing worse than the crashing down of a big book; besides, it's sacrilege!"

The visitor removed his elbow from its dangerous proximity with such meek subjection that the scholar was touched in spite of himself, but he routed the momentary weakness.

"Hope you are not going to walk up that path always when you go out" (this was the one path of the ascent in view of the windows); "it fidgets one; and if you read you'll crawl up like a snail."

The boy smiled, and very sweetly expressed his willingness to avoid the path indicated. The smile sank like a sunbeam, and the old man went after it with a pick and rooted it out, flayed it, trampled it, quenched it. He was not going to give way to the weaknesses of other frivolous folk, fickle-minded, empty-headed; he looked as sour as it was possible to look, and just nipped that smile like a frost.

Rising from his high-backed throne, he nodded to a vast array of crammed book-shelves.

"Take any of them—bring back when read, and exchange for others—if—if the study is vacant." This with a narrow lightning glance that caused the stranger to wince, although it would have been difficult to tell why.

"The lady with you yesterday your mother, I presume? Don't know much of mothers, but suppose she's proud of you. Tell her I counsel giving up all such foolish nonsense; you're neither better nor worse than other sons, and are likely to become rather worse."

Although startled, the boy manifested no annoyance at the tone adopted by his host. Looking up in the rigid face with a mute forgiveness, he was about to rise for departure, when—

"You'll mind the chair doesn't creak if you're going to get up; it's horrible! Next to the unearthly clatter of fire-irons, I know of nothing more irritating."

The boy arose with every care, so softly never a sound was heard; then the scholar muttered—

"I do hate that cat-like movement! It's just how the girls go about the house; one never knows when one's coming upon them or where they'll turn up next—keeps one in a state of chronic nervousness."

He strode the chamber, still convulsively clutching at his gown; then, with a gasp, he confronted the boy, who receded a step.

"I wish you'd break yourself of that smile you have. I can't bear people always smiling; it's a senseless habit. All very well during some play-house comedy, but in private life it's frivolity, Sir, frivolity!" The smile died away, but the same pleasant look remained, as though irradiating from within. The scholar softened a shade. "I was going to say, take your mother a few flowers from the garden—no message, mind; messages are ridiculous, and—and—tell her it spoils a landscape sitting about on camp-stools—knew there was something I wanted to say—try the sea line, more healthy."

At this moment the singular man swooped down upon a piece of ribbon, a bow of Violet's; he caught and clutched it fiercely, the talon-like fingers meeting upon the relic, while he muttered to himself. Thrusting it in one of the pockets of his gown, he turned sharply, saying—

"Good-morning!" Marching with jerky abruptness to the door, which he opened as in a house of the dead, and with a rattling sort of gliding passed to the passage, and to the breakfast-room, where his girl sat on a hassock by the fire dressing a doll. He stood on the hearth-rug, erect in his woven glow of hap-hazard color, while she looked up in his face wistfully, yearning for a smile where never a smile shone.

"You like your doll as much as ever, eh?"

There was something so inexpressibly solicitous she was surprised at the new interest, and arose, twining arms about the cold, gaunt, loveless man.

"Quite, papa dear! I'm a little girl still, you know."

"Don't romp about as you used," grumbled the old man; "no running on the landing, and up and down stairs."

"You said you couldn't bear the noise, papa."

"Ah! Did I? I'd forgotten. Like the old colored picture-books still, Violet?"

"Oh yes, papa. I shall always love the dear old pictures."

At that he turned upon her surly as a bear.

"Nothing was said about love, I believe; not aware I mentioned the word."

"I'm sure, papa, I—"

"Nonsense! Ridiculous, applying the word to books!" (This from the man that had been all love for the books, and for the books alone.) "Do you know why I removed from London, child, while you were but demi-folio, so to speak? It was to live quiet; vehicles jarred upon me, boys and girls jarred upon me, men and women jarred upon me, and now the quiet retreat I've buried myself in is to be run over by a troop. The village ought to have a fence round; I wish I'd bought that tumble-down cottage. But rare editions get to such a price, and run up so, I haven't a pound to spare unnecessarily—you'll have those fire-irons down if you don't mind; of all discords on God's earth there's nothing comes up to the clatter of poker and tongs." Here the master paused to ring the bell violently, and upon the appearance of a sphinx-like domestic, he grumbled—

"There's a door outside—stable or wash-house—creaking like the gibbet; have it off the hinges. And the old spout above this window, jangle and drip, jangle and drip; there is nothing, I do think, comes up to an old water-spout for giving one the horrors. That'll do. I think you've your fingers entangled in my girdle, Violet—it's jerking me; I can't bear to be jerked—where was I? Oh, going to say, don't use the study; no books there to interest you; dull room, and carpet gone thread-bare from the traffic; keep out, there's a good girl!" and he patted her much in the graceful fashion of an Esquimau patting his reindeer, and trotted his bony frame round the table, and out at the door, and up the great gloomy stairs to the den, heavy and dim, above. A fire was burning in the grate; he drew up a chair, as though about to cleave it asunder, then shivered and shrank at his own noise, and finally planted the slipper soles on the top bar, staring in the fire and muttering, until two fiend coals portrayed the faces of that boy and girl, when he sledged back as though wolf-bitten, and swung over to the lattice, which he thrust apart, and pushed his head out for the cool reviving air, and saw below that very boy and girl a-gathering pompons.

He just lifted one of his volumes—a book of medium bulk—and sent it swift at curly-head, who was bending gallantly to the proffered bunch of red and white buttons, and would have crunched it like a snail, but that mathematics overweighted and fell flat to the gravel; whereon he regretted adding worse to bad, for the book was precious, but being the largest to hand, impulse had cannoned.

Then he rang the bell furiously, and scoured over to the window again, to find his youthful lordship turning over the leaves of that volume with evident interest, and thinking, no doubt, it had been graciously dispatched, according to custom of the country, for his especial edification. He looked up to the irate face, smiled the fair smile again, lifted his cap of seal-skin with winning grace, gleaned up the pompons, and disappeared, with the book under his arm. Vanished, with such a chronicle for the pale lady mother, who took the head of curls between her hands, and looked wistfully down to the depth of eyes. The curls tossed a little under the scrutiny, but she held the fair brow firm.

"Look at me; up in my face, love."

He was in her favorite attitude, upon a hassock at her feet. He looked up candidly enough.

"Do you feel inclined to go to the great house very often, my boy?"

"No, mamma. Why?"

"I fancied, from the warmth of your description, that the attraction was great."

He colored at that, but answered wisely—

"I am fond of flowers, and fonder still of books; you know it, dear," looking reproachfully.

"I should feel glad for you to find both elsewhere."

"Why, mamma, I was only thinking, while walking home, of the boon our neighbor's kindness had opened up to us; but if you are unwilling, I will never go near the place again."

"There spoke my own brave boy! Thanks, darling. You know I have but you in all the world; let us keep to one another, and in each other's love and companionship experience the enjoyment of old. We are poor, but I will contrive to spare something from the housekeeping to procure you books; our little garden shall be gay with these late blossoms. From what you tell me of the owner of yonder mansion, I believe he far from welcomes your intrusion; he invited you upon the impulse of the moment; you see how painfully impulsive he is; such men are very kind —unthinkingly; even hospitable—unconsciously; but equally sensitive, morbidly so, and in afterthought inclined to regret expressions their excitable nature dictated. You have not gone too far to recede. There, there, my boy, you are not sorry because I have spoken? Kiss me, and let your mother stand before the strangers. We will return these books by the good pastor; he will oblige us by presenting our thanks and apology; he is very good."

The old man looked in during the afternoon, just to see how they were getting on, he said, with pleasant cordiality. The lady was up stairs dressing; her son made way by the fire for the welcome visitor. After greeting—

"Well, Sir, and how do you like our learned patron?"

"Not much," answered the boy, with refreshing candor.

"Ah! you think him dry and unsociable; it comes of living alone with the old books."

"Not quite alone."

"So, so; thinking of lady-bird?"

The boy moved restlessly, half angrily, then bowed.

"If the little girl can not make him sociable, I think nobody can. He really wants pelting with love and attention. Mamma doesn't approve, or I'd do it myself."

The pastor looked in mute astonishment upon the youthful knight.

"You think he needs wooing from his books." Then, with a sly twinkle, "I understand; *you* want to get upon more intimate footing, and I am to manage it. Is it not so?"

"Quite the reverse; we intended trespassing upon your kindness to the extent of asking you to favor us by returning these books."

The visitor looked chagrined at that, but made no further comment, for the lady at the moment entered, elegant in quiet afternoon attire.

"I hope you are well to-day, my dear madam?" extending a hand brown with garden work and gloveless expeditions on the downs.

"Yes, thank you, and invigorated by your bracing air already."

"Our friend of the Bishop's House speaks highly of the air."

The lady bowed, almost coldly, not to be drawn into talking of that saturnine personage. The young gentleman poked the fire. The pastor coughed, thinking he did not understand Dissenters. The lady volunteered upon the once-for-all principle, but with such sweet composure that it disarmed surprise.

"You will quite understand that when we took this little place we were indifferent to our neighbors; we would remain so still. The family you allude to are no more to us than the fishers in the miserable cottages on the outskirts of your village; not so much, in fact."

"Bless my soul!" murmured the conservative divine, bringing his hand down upon the clerical broadcloth like a veritable father of the church and the state.

"I have had enough to do with literary and intellectual people," continued the lady, "to know that they shun intrusion and avoid strangers. Your friend's manners and messages prove him no exception. We, on our part, are unable to return hospitality; our means will not admit of it. We also like to be very quiet and to keep to ourselves; therefore you will appreciate my seeming uncouthness, and pardon that which is so suggestive of ingratitude."

The old man bowed, then, with a pleasant smile—

"At all events you will permit *me* to call now and then, to see if I can serve you in any way?"

She extended her hand, so glad he had not taken offense. Turning to her boy—

"Run and fetch poor papa's portrait from my room, dear!" and he went, on the instant, and had no sooner gone than she hastily confided—

"He is growing—there is a girl—the child already interests him; quite natural, I know, but I would guard him from it. Neither your friend nor I can afford to lose our darlings."

And he understood, replying by a look that made them friends for life.

He soon returned with the portrait of poor papa. Only a photograph taken one day when he had felt so weak and ill, that he feared lest the tired life should vanish and no shadow be left them, neglecting meanwhile the dinner his faithful wife had been so careful to enjoin he should not forget.

It was a characteristic study, the old Episcopalian gingerly handling the card, looking upon the broad forehead and handsome features of the talented, unpaid, unencouraged one, whose fair promising life had consumed itself upon its altar; then looking over the rim of his glasses, and catching the eyes of the boy so like, and that wonderful smile so precious to the mother who treasured smiling days as jewel-studded, made note of in the pages of a poor little shilling diary, repeated year by year, and growing fewer and fewer as the living face formed and grew like to the dead.

The pastor took the books himself in the evening, after tea.

The student sat near a green-shaded lamp, writing on days far back in past centuries. The pastor opened the door softly; then finding it unheard (not a door of the Bishop's House made a noise upon opening), and seeing the master so intently engaged, retreated, closing it with equal softness, and made for that cozy little room where Violet sat alone, as usual, drawn up to the fire, but happy with her cat and work. The charm of this picture following so closely upon the grim and studious interior he had just left vividly impressed the quiet on-looker, who stood enjoying it some few minutes before speaking. The soft light of a lamp shed a halo about the tresses not yet turned, like the leaves, to sober coloring. Stooping above the work, her beauty had never seemed of more gentle mould; its fresh color, wooed forth of the fire, settling like a bloom that one feared must vanish from the cheek were the graceful head to lift; the dark eyelashes being a foil of shading in symmetry with the lines of thought.

"I would not disturb your papa, and came to you first, Fairy. Are you quite well, little one?"

"Very well, thank you, and so glad you are come! Papa has been at that horrid writing ever since tea-time. Do you know, I sometimes think I will hide all his papers. Now tell me the news. Is little Tommy Styles better of his cold? And did poor old Mrs. Muggeridge like the honey? And how—is—the—lady—at the cottage?"

"Getting settled, Violet, thank you; and Dame Styles desires her very grateful thanks, and Tommy is decidedly better of his cold."

"Were — the — pompons — liked?" She was busy, bent over a refractory knot, and tugged that wool as though to stretch it from thence away to Berlin. And the pastor watched the operation with a curious expression, coming closer and stooping with a hand on each knee; and she knew, and the little fingers fumbled more awkwardly still. At last, feeling foolishly confused, she ventured to look up, and meeting the kind, inquiring eyes of him more father than her own, just sprang into the open arms and buried her blushes in his beard.

"Naughty girl!" came very kindly, while he patted the tresses. "To be fluttered about a few pompons! Yes, they are liked, and are in the best vases; let that content thee. And now I am going to tell you a very brief fairy-tale; you have not had one for a long time. Don't you remember the winter evening stories of last year?"

"Yes; the dear old stories!" And the girl clasped her hands, looking thoughtfully into the fire as though one or other of them had come true since then.

"Ay, there was one I never told. I waited a seasonable opportunity; it is frosty to-night, and the time will do. There was a girl, Violet, who lived away in a flower village amidst the hills, and her papa was chief noble of the country-side. They lived in an old château beyond the village a little, and where the road wound onward to the coast. A stern, proud, and scholarly man, this was his dream—to live apart from the false and fickle world, and devote his days to books and the culture of his daughter. His love for her passed fathoming, it was so deep and sacred; yet his nature, taciturn and reserved, never betrayed the secret, and the most critical of their neighbors never dreamed that the stern man loved his girl with any such wondrous passion. It came to pass that strangers from the city of the hills came to dwell within the village. A vacant chalet almost under foliage of the trees girting the lordly pile was their humble home: a lady and her son, a mere boy, but well-favored, and seeming all the more so in a little village where uncomely faces of the country-folk were all to look on year by year."

He felt a trembling at his knee, and the small fingers creeping upward to his shoulder, but never a word was spoken. He went on, merciless; doing this for his old friend, who he knew could never have done it for himself.

"Well, Violet, the girl saw these, and was attracted by the ruddy beauty and clustering curls of the boy, and still more by the courteous ways which, acquired of town life and the schools, and aided by grace that came of gentle parentage, were likely to entrap the thoughts of such as her. And as the days went on she grew to think still more of one who, at a change of scene, would quite forget her. Papa, with breaking heart, remarking less of love for him, would muse on it fretting, but saying no word of all his fears to her. You are a big girl, dear, now, and have read in the old romances of a sweetmeat stuff the young amuse themselves with in idle hours called Love; a mischievous thing it is, and destitute alike of sense and reason. So this girl of my story went knocking her head against that stupidness, and thought it mighty fine, I doubt not; but a fairy, who loved this little lady, stepped upon the scene, and made a picture pass before her eyes, of a sleek and lovely tiger, with soft and fawning ways, crouching to be admired; and of herself passing with papa, who tried to hold her back, but from whom she broke away to pat and caress that tiger, which turned and gobbled her up, and stole off to lie in wait for a similar meal. But this was not all, for it caused the death of poor papa, who could not live without his darling."

The attentive listener drew a long breath, looking into the clear coals, at the moral, maybe; then just turned to wind arms around the story-teller's neck.

And in the study.

No sooner had the door closed upon the pastor than the writer laid down his pen, arose electrically, glided over to the door, and with bowed head listened. Keen as a hound, he knew the step and the destination. Fidgety, hesitative, thinking to join them in the other room, thinking he could not spare the time, looking wistfully back to the writing, then down upon the crimson carpet problems spreading at his feet, then up to the gloomy panels of the door, and finally gliding back in three paces to his manuscript, muttering—

"Why can't he come in the afternoon instead of crawling about just as I'm sitting down to my work? It disturbs one. I don't care for Violet's being there with him; her place is with me. If I go in, never return to the desk with the same freshness; bothers me—very much!"

He tried to write, but those Egyptian ethics seemed crisp, dry as mummy casings. His thoughts wandered from dead and withered Cheops to the sweet-faced daughter in yonder room, who, for all he knew, might be lavishing upon another the caresses he had always put from him, not because they were unwelcome, but that he really had not time. The vaulted dead of all the centuries seemed always waiting to entice him to their cold company.

He placed the pen straight again—he was careful with that pen; he could not tell the years he had used the holder, and could not have brought his thumb firm to another. Then he trotted over the room again and out into the passage, and took measured, ghostly strides below the flickering lamp, suspended in the centre of the hall. The space struck chill; he shivered a little, and opened the other door, so quietly that neither knew; saw his girl, to whom he was icicle-father, playing daughter to the church, and became colder still, waxing mildly, frostily irritable; and then he heard enough of the fairy lesson to melt with a great, grand sorrow; and heard this, from Violet, looking into the crackling fire—

"Oh, if papa would only let me love him, I should never want to love any body more—never—never—never!"

And he retreated before it. Back to his high walls of learning, his piles of thought and pillars of dry wisdom; but all the place was dreary and dark, and he shuddered at his own gaunt shadow on the floor. How the words echoed, thrilled, seemed to drag him from out himself, and show him the grim, unlovely soul he was! He paced the crimson carpet, hands clasped behind. A bronze Homer in the corner frowned at the neophyte, dingy lines of volumes linked a reproach, foolscap on the table seemed to scathe with lightning enmity at his wavering; then, lo! a sign: a fine stuffed owl, the emblem of his faith, placed with the books lofty above the antlers, toppled and fell. It was by no supernatural aid; simply the wind which scoured from over the Downs as though on chase for stars across the sea; and the casements and the chimneys of the old house rattled with weird defiance of the master's nerves, and winds within, like imprisoned furies, howled and shrieked and whistled and moaned the length of the lonely corridor, trying hard to join the riotous crew assailing the walls without; and together they made such a commotion he did not wonder much that his poor old owl had toppled over. Still, it looked so very like disgust, and he stood over it pen in hand, listening dolorously to the noise, unwilling to touch or leave it.

Midst of which the pastor entered, benevolent of face, gentle of mien, and could not quite understand the student standing something like a mourner, but at last came up with the catastrophe, upon which he looked half comically.

"What! is the old bird gone?"

He knew that old bird by long experience, had often glanced at it with ludicrous respect, longing, perhaps, to send a book at its roost, so imperturbable was its provoking stony wisdom.

"Hush—sh!"

The master leaned over his favorite, and carefully raised the dust-thick plumage, holding it forth and looking into the eyes as though to read his course.

"Is it an omen?" in breathless under-tone.

"Of nothing, save that the old house wants repairing and you want rest. Go to Brighton, or, better still, to London, for a change, and permit the masons and carpenters to come in; it will do you and Fairy good. What with crotchets and study, fidgets and nerves, you are half beside yourself. Shake the whole off, and it will be but just in time. Forgive my freedom—you know me."

The master looked up dazed; such iconoclasm took his breath away. Half an hour ago he would have resented it finely, now he received it with a sort of moody indifference. The pastor could tell by clutching of the gown that some struggle was in progress, those nervously twitching fingers were so expressive, and he went back to Violet, to whom he said a few words in a low voice.

The child ran forth, and gently entered the sacred place, where the tall man was wiping dust from the dishevelled plumage. Winding her arms about him, she lisped, with cunning prattle, "Love *me* now, papa!"

At which a wonderful light passed over his face, great gleams of joy, and flashings of quick pain. Quietly, with much grace and control, he placed the bird upon his manuscript, turned the lamp low, and then opened his arms and embraced her fondly.

This little event was never forgotten by either of those immediately concerned. It was not alluded to, but its good effect was visible in the fact that the student gave up much more of his time to his child than as heretofore to his abstruse studies.

Sometimes Bertie Evans and Violet Hamilton met, but it was always in the company of their parents, who interchanged civilities and pursued their separate walks.

Great was the excitement in Hawkingdean when it was known that the other old house, closed for so long, had become possessed of a tenant; still greater when this tenant was found to be the eminent preacher, whose fame had somehow penetrated even to this out-of-the-way place. The Moated Grange had been purchased, it was said, by this great man, and much good was expected of it by the poor, who tidied up their places, clean-bibbed their urchins, expended a trifle upon chintz at the general store to new curtain the windows, and cleared away long-standing rubbish in odd corners.

There could be no doubt the fortunate news was correct, for the whole house had been well prepared and in part refurnished, although, it was believed, in somewhat humble fashion. Anon the housekeeper was known to have come, "quite a lady" (the village declared), and a couple of servants, very kind-looking girls, it was said; and shortly afterward it was rumored that the great man himself was upon the scene, and strict watch was kept between the laces and bottles of sticky sweets. All the dames stood on all the door-steps and stared with wonder and admiration when he was seen coming down the street; they had not stared at a man so much since a real live huntsman in a scarlet coat passed through their village. The smith came leaning a brawny arm against the post of his shed, for it was something indeed to see so courtly-looking a person in the quiet street, talking freely and familiarly with all, a kind word and smile for each. The sexton's sharp eyes were actively employed while the gentleman passed, and he said to his blind granddaughter, sitting silent by the fire, but thinking so much, "Mayhap there's better times in store for the village; an' the winter maybe won't try us so, arter all!" So much said the new face among them.

Naturally the pastor called early, and warmly expressed his pleasure at the good fortune which had sent them such a neighbor; and these two being gentle creatures, both of them learned in and loving the same theology, kinsmen to one divinity, and warmed by the same charity, soon became good friends enough. Mr. Garland was equally in sympathy with the love of the breezy heights shared by the pastor and his friend of the Bishop's House. In Brighton Mr. Garland resided at a distance from the Downs; here he could be upon them instantly, and without having one hundred thousand pairs of eyes bent upon him on his way thither.

To such souls of all the English tracts these South Downs bespeak the infinitely sublime. The poet and the painter have loved them also with rare affection, while the equestrian holds the sixty miles of springy turf indented by these picturesque villages the most pleasant ground upon which to indulge his favorite exercise, still solitary as when in ancient days merchants from distant parts landed upon these shores. The Southern men were favored: barter with the nations landing on the coast gave an advantage to the Gallic race peopling these slopes, which, like the hunting grounds of the red-skin, were the Elysian fields of the braves. Here they were born; upon these bracing heights grew to virile hardihood; here they gloried in the chase, and decked the long-tressed daughters of the tribes with trophies of their savage sport; here they were buried, upon the summit of the range of hills, eastward, face upward to the wide scroll of stars. Here Druids built rude altars, and on their nights of sacrifice slaughtered the flower of the youth, until the hill-sides ran red even to the sea. This priest of a later faith viewed the scene of those mystic rites with keen interest. No red fires now lighted up the heights, no discordant chant awoke an echo; the distant sheep bells, the dog's warning bark, and a vast plateau seemingly given over to peace and solitude.

The pastoral swains had not always known peace. Far back in past centuries men of the Downs and men of the Sea hereabout were in open rivalry. A great inundation had overwhelmed the Flemish coast, and the Flanders fishermen (at that time considered the most daring upon the sea-board) resorted hither in a colony. To-day they preserve in Bruges traditions inscribed on quaint parchment of the wonders worked by these men of their coast. We think of the Belgium of our day as chiefly remarkable for superb farming, a toy coast-line of some forty miles, a fine town celebrated for its manufacture of carpets and lace, a poem-like, old-world city, with a cathedral possessed of the loftiest tower in Europe and the finest painting in the world, and an intelligent race of people who appreciate the English as they are appreciated nowhere else upon the Continent; but at the time we write of, that coast-line was of great importance to the people, and its fishermen were much depended upon: these, with a sprinkling of the tillers of the soil, settled on our shores, and inaugurated a prosperity that produced jealousy and a fierce rivalry that existed for centuries. But it is different now, and peaceful every where: even that fair girl-child of the recluse, whom the country-folk in untrained compliment loved to call the "Little Queen of the South Downs," might roam for a long walk by the sea safe from molestation. The days had passed when the wrecker, the buccaneer, and the smuggler made this a dangerous route; men of the haven were kind with a rough courtesy when they met her, and any of them would have imperilled life for the young beauty. Never would it be forgotten how once, when younger, gathering wild flowers with her maid, she strayed and was lost. The whole place turned out and gave the country-side a searching, the like of which had not been seen since they hunted here for witches. It was evening; the Downs were draped with gray mist, and shadows crept along the slopes like giant forms aiding the quest; stars twinkled above the sea, lights shone from cottages of fishermen and herdsmen; all the roadways were bare and white, not a figure was to be seen; the men kindled torches, and in separate bands searched the dusky hills, while the women-folk turned out to watch the glimmering trail of lights, now up, now down, like a far-away procession of glow-worms. At last they found her, fast asleep, tired with wandering, but not afraid; she knew the hills too well to fear, knew that when morning came she would find the way back somehow. They found her with the pretty head pillowed on an old sheep which, as though conscious of the precious charge of this gentle lamb, was lying perfectly still; it had kept her company faithfully, kept her warm through the chilly, misty hours. Geoffrey Hamilton gave a purse of gold to the shepherd in charge, and purchased the meek-eyed animal for his little girl's especial pleasure; to the villagers who had found her he likewise gave a golden requital; the treasure he had been near to losing was restored, and what was all else compared with that?

Many a time had Mr. Garland walked over the Downs at night, but never once had he met a soul. Men might see him take some shadowy road leading to the lonely hills, might see him return at dawn, but neither man nor woman did he meet all the time of that solitary journey. The peasantry love not these mystical solitudes after nightfall: there are strange stories current of bad deeds done therein, and of an uncanny company said to hold congress at midnight—relics of those superstitious times we told of, when this was an amphitheatre of dark performances, or was said to be; fears of the supernatural order, fostered by the phenomenal effects of the night season. By evil spells, unholy incantations, and the grim ritual of necromancy, much ill was supposed to be wrought. It was an age that believed in witchcraft, that feared it, that bribed it, that crossed itself against it, and that burned it, but that could not root it out. In spite of it all, the witches held high carnival, and rode on broomsticks from Hawkingdean to Devil's Dyke in ghastly company, causing the fairies to scamper from their rings, and insects under the long stalks of grass to creep timorously away. We do but repeat the fireside faith of the age. The story did not stop at witches and their familiars; the peasantry will still tell of how the Evil One in person was once seen at sunset-time standing upon the upmost ridge in dark relief against the sky; was seen to descend toward the village, where awe-struck watch was kept, while the men stuffed the chimney-place with sacks, laid the Bible down at the entrance, and pasted sheets of brown paper over the door at the back. A terrible time was passed: he was known to be about in the village, and nobody durst go out to see what he was up to.

So tremendous was the evil wrought by the South Down witches that the Monks of Lewes Priory once proceeded in solemn procession, with crosses and candles, to the "Satanic Chasm," better known as the Devil's Dyke, where, with great ceremony, in presence of a circle of scared rustics, the Downs were duly exorcised for the benefit of the shepherds. What with witches, priests, fairies, thieves, and the French, the sheep had a hard time of it.

Woe befell all maiden ladies who kept black cats! Those given to study and learning were considered tainted, and were watched accordingly. Did cattle breed amiss or crops fail, was there less sunshine or more rain-fall, it was set down to the class which did not study, and whose charm was its ignorance. Red-haired folk were looked upon with violent antipathy, black tresses were said to be directly imported from Satan, and blonde ringlets were the certain insignia of fiend-bestowed attractiveness. The trail of snails on the front-door, and the squabble of two drakes on the pond, especially if the wind blew the smoke a particular way, was proof emphatic. Altogether, although bewitching and enchanting times, rural existence at that day was decidedly a snare.

Over these Downs had come a traveller, who, while standing upon the highermost ridge, his back to the setting sun, might have been painted for Lucifer himself—a tall and imperious being of mocking cast, black against the yellow-red sky, seemingly standing upon one of the summits of the earth, viewing the panorama of pastoral peace. This circle of hills, with its wide sweep from Beachy Head to Hampshire, pleased him vastly; it recalled the mighty grass lands of Australia, where, by-the-way, if he had not been a particularly honored individual, he had at least had breathing room, and had made the most of his space. With folded arms he stood looking over the undulating greensward, and a scornful curl of the lip rendered the face additionally sardonic.

"Sometimes I think sheep-farming out West is the only enjoyable existence. I did not want to return there, but, on my honor, the cares of diplomacy, the worry of commerce, the constant scrutiny requisite to keep the gentlemen in my employ up to the mark, the bother of mixing in society, the continual tax upon one's intellect, the awful drain upon one's genius, the fatigue of my seasons of royalty when with the tribes, the surveillance necessary to keep the people out of some confounded scrape or other, all come heavy upon one pair of shoulders, and I often think the life out there, notwithstanding its minimum of profit, presents the simple alternative between working to death and working to live. But, however, the work is not over here just yet."

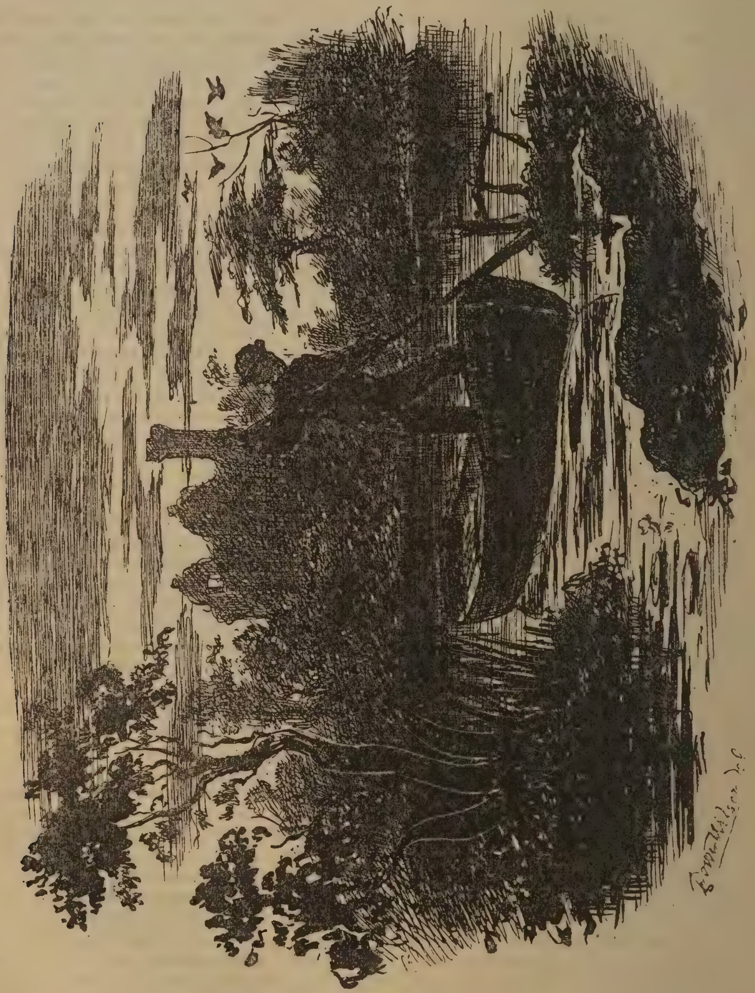
Slowly descending the slope he entered the village, and in the twilight descried the glimmer of a light through the red curtain of an inn. It must be an inn, he thought; nothing else would present that roseate glow. As he approached, the light shone cheerily in the dusk. Looking round, he made his first acquaintance with Hawkingdean—shadowy trees and the stretch of misty hillock; clusters of cottages, with delicious bits of garden, in many of which were fragrant roses; a pretty church that seemed to have crept into a niche of the great chalk range; some white palings that looked ghostly in the evening light; a pond that reflected back the gray; felled timber, like the grim and silent witnesses after a battle; and that inn, quaintly built as some picturesque hostel of Holland. From the opening to the valley came sound of the sea at no great distance; its rumbling echoed along the cleft, and would have been heard with yet greater distinctness but for the wind scouring down from the hills. The traveller had not yet seen what he had come to see—the Moated Grange—and before entering the hostel he walked on farther through the village. He thought he had come upon it when the Bishop's House was reached, and he stood looking at the pile, which was gloomy enough to impress even this mysterious being. There was one light at the upper chamber where Geoffrey Hamilton was deep in study, with his daughter sitting beside the fire; and Noel Barnard, who had heard sufficient of the abstracted student to arouse his interest, contemplated the owl's nest with admiration and curiosity. He went on, passed Mrs. Evans's tasteful little house, and crossed an open space on which was a pond with some geese, and a line of linen-posts whereby the good-wives dried their washing. He could smell the salt sea from this point; it was an unsheltered corner, open to the four winds of heaven, exposed to the Channel mists, often flooded by the water-courses among the hills, bared sullenly to the great showers that seemed to gather purposely for cleansing it; and here fittingly was the fisher colony—two rows of black and cheerless cottages, without gardens (nothing but shingle would grow hereabouts), without the picturesque and rural surroundings peculiar to English villages; only black walls, white door-steps, gray oyster shells, and slate flints; but the inmates were happy and healthy. Slight kinship was there between the tillers of the land and the toilers of the sea; little enough had Hawkingdean folk heard of their ancestors, but here tradition was ingrafted for all time.

"Come to the end of the world, I suppose!" said the traveller, turning with disrelish from the quarter.

In lieu of retracing his way, he took a narrow road between the yard and the uprearing grass land and cultivated belongings of a farm. This brought him to a huge garden, girt in with iron palings. The trees and shrubs were so dense and thick within that he could see nothing; but, walking round, his industry was rewarded by meeting with a gap where once a pathway had been, and to which an old iron gate, fast locked, gave ingress. Mr. Barnard's long legs relieved him at once of any impediment so far as barriers were concerned, and he was soon at the end of the deserted path, arriving at a flight of stone steps, slippery, and overgrown with moist weed, and washed by the water of a sluggish moat. The water was broad and black and unutterably dreary-looking, the tangled growth upon its banks afforded covert for numerous wild fowl undisturbed from year's end to year's end, broad lilies grew upon its surface, fiery-eyed creatures lurked within its hollows, and a weird haze seemed to envelop the whole neighborhood. The broken, blackened column of an ancient water arch was shadowy amidst the sedges below; moored to a rusty ring attached to a rotting post was an old disused boat; beyond the moat a garden wilderness, wild as though never trodden by human foot or tended by human hand; and rising up, all shadowy and irregular, yet even thus beautiful, the Grange.

"A queer place to become the possessor of," murmured the observer. "Bought it cheap, I fancy; lively home for the housekeeper, if of nervous tendencies."

He dragged the boat toward him with a vigorous pull; the staple gave way, and the sluggish water floated the lumbering craft to his feet. Feeling first if it contained water or was uncomfortably damp, and finding the latter to be the case, he brought from the bank a quantity of dry leaves and cushioned therewith the seat which he proposed to use, then pushed off, and might well have been taken for the ghastly ferry-man of Styx. His intention was to approach the building by the water-way, and ascertain how far the key handed him by his legal factotum served its purpose. Very slowly the bulky old craft floated round, the one oar stirring the water lazily and as if with reluctance. On either side the creatures crouching in the black hollows and under the clumped bushes uttered the alarm note to the tribes ahead, and mighty was the scampering up the banks. It is wondrous, the connection of ideas. This goblin-like personage, seated in his lumbering boat, on the dusky water-way, disturbing the whole cordon of beast and reptile, makes this remark—



"THEN PUSHED OFF, AND MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN TAKEN FOR THE GHASTLY FERRY-MAN OF STYX."

"I wonder how my precious wife is getting on? Put her out rather, I fancy, that return of Helen's child. Shouldn't be surprised if Lindon gives Hortense her *congé*."

Tranquilly the boat glided on, even to the broken arch of which O'Connor had spoken. Here were several steps, and above them the huge iron door. He secured the boat by tying its iron ring with his red and yellow pocket-handkerchief to a corresponding staple as on the other side. The door had not been unlocked for ages, and presented a work of some difficulty, owing to the rust and incrusting of noisome excrescences. This forced open, a passage was before him, dark, damp, and vault-like; hissing inmates darted past him over his boots for the steps; fluttering creatures flew swift for the opening thus suddenly disclosed, fanning his face; while on the walls his hands encountered indescribable ones.

"An under-ground paradise!" he muttered. "I wonder what they charge for apartments hereabouts? Reminds me of my lively sensations when lost in the catacombs; guide thought I was done for; wasn't; turned up again, the richer by a magnificent diamond ring. Fond of exploring by myself; hate parties; so much irreverence and vulgarity; no respect for the ancient or historic; prevent interested research too! Stopping at Ghizeh, party starting for the Pyramids—always make for Cheops, must have the most for their money—*I* made for Mycerinus, quarter of the size, and nobody there. Went poking about in three or four quadrangular-shaped chambers; stationed a black fellow outside; presently came upon a quadrangular-shaped stone, rather different to the rest; tools with me, hoisted it; coffer inscribed with select Egyptian, and filled with rings, necklets, etc., once the adornment of some of my honored forefathers. Great respect for their tombs. One of these days I'll try the Sphinx; have an idea it'll pay for the time. Sha'n't forget first view of her, seen upon a clear bright night: graceful head, clear-cut, gray, flooded with the pale lustre, majestic expression, somewhat African, the mouth exquisite. Overcome, I fell on the sand, and made obeisance to my royal ancestress. But this lively passage is uncommonly like one in those Alexandrian catacombs, although can't say the refreshing stream reminds me of the Mediterranean. But now to see what Ptolemy Lagus may be about."

Chattering to himself in this fashion while lighting his small pocket lantern, Mr. Barnard then softly applied his science in relation to mechanics, and opened the inner door. It admitted him to a cellar, and by natural transition Charon became transformed to Guido Fawkes. This under-ground storage place was of large dimensions; in days of Cavalier troubles it had been used for other purposes than the bountiful stowing away of wines. Mr. Barnard did not stop here. The remaining door gave him but slight trouble. Beyond was a flight of steps, and he extinguished his light before mounting these, for he concluded they would conduct to one of the outer offices. They did, to a cold back kitchen, scrupulously avoided by the nervous domestics. He saw a light between the hinged jointing of a door, and cautiously peered through. Within was the servants' kitchen, where two maids were seated at a table, both on the high gossip, one working, the other staring hard and superstitiously at a huge snuff on the tallow candle; and this one was saying, to Mr. Barnard's intense relish—

"Depend on it, there's sum-mat wrong; look at it; my granny says whin-iver that shape is seen there's sum-mat uncanny stirring about. The sniffers is in the back kitchen, but I no more dares go in for 'em than I dares go in the back gardin for the horse-redish to put on the supper table. An' that Miss Evelyn's as bold as a lion; only two nights sin' I seed her actually a-walking down by the moat, the moon a-shining, the snow a-fallin', and she like a sperrit, nothin' to do with which it's my belief and allus has been, the place is haunted. Jist hear the noises on windy nights!"

"Mrs. Mellerton used to say 'twas the passage leading to the moat, and the age of the old house."

"Well, I knows it isn't pleasant living in a place where there's a passage leading to a moat, and if it wasn't for the wages, and for feeling all right when master's in the house, I couldn't stop. My granny has told me of them witches as she heerd on when a gal; sich tales as would make your 'air stand on hend! 'Betsy Jane,' she says to me, 'notice the smoke, and don't turn toward the Downs if it blows in the directshun of the Divil's Dyke,' nor more I don't."

"Young Master Evans told me such tales were idle talk and country gossip, and that we should not heed them; he's a nice, kind young gentleman."

"He may be, but shows his ignorance not believing in the witches; ask any o' th' folk in the village. I haven't lived here much, but granny has, and when she heerd as how I was to be under 'ouse-maid at the Grange she jist lifts up her 'ands an' says, does that dear old 'oman, 'It'll be the joy o' my 'eart to have Betsy Jane so close agin me, but I'm sorry, I am, it's the Grange she's agoing to; it's allus borne a bad name, and dark's the deeds, I doubts, but 'ave bin done there.'"

The silent listener paused to hear no more of this edifying conversation: he knew already that Garland had arrived, that Constance Evelyn was an inmate of the house, and for the time being he was satisfied. He did not, as some coarse practical joker might have done, maliciously make some horribly sounding supernatural noise with the object of half frightening these poor maids to death, but withdrew quietly enough to his water-stairs and boat and the gloomy channel.

Mr. Barnard having left all safe and secure behind him, with a satisfied smile betook him to the cozy, red-curtained little inn. It was not a buxom landlady of the approved description who advanced to meet him; on the contrary, it was a hostess whose buxomness was deficient, whose thinness and sharpness and tartness were of that order which demands much carbonate to make it palatable. In early life she had married Jabez Payne, and he had spent his savings upon buying this place for public entertainment. The worst of it was, nor man nor beast ever came that way to be entertained. The Grange was unoccupied, the pastor had his ale from a Lewes brewery, the genteel inhabitants of the village received it in bottled form from Brighton, the master of the Bishop's House didn't drink, the farmers brewed their own, and the yokels (Mrs. Payne's word) only drank small beer, so that it was not a profitable or progressive speculation; and sorely at first did the good woman repine. A gentleman sportsman now and then, or a tourist party, would have enlivened business, but the village was so out of the route there were absolutely not even these to cater for. The house was pretty enough and comfortable, but then, as Mrs. Payne briefly remarked, "One doesn't care to marry into a public-house to find it a private one." Jabez made a good husband so long as he lasted, but anon he was taken up the street to his last home, and the thin woman remained to await the patrons. She had worn down to an apathetic calmness, and had given up looking for the coming guest; even that solitary huntsman who had lost himself between the hills rode through without bestowing a look upon the sign. This last was a great blow, and after it the woman waxed quietly impervious, although not perceptibly decreasing in sourness. When Mrs. Payne saw the singular-looking yet distinguished visitor (whom for the moment she took to be a foreigner) enter her hostelry and affably request accommodation for a night or two, she distinctly felt within herself (as she afterward said when communing with her maid upon the eventful circumstance) as though the long-waited-for had come. Altogether things seemed looking up in Hawkingdean; even the famous tenant of the Grange had given her an order for the ale required by his household. "A most polite attention," Mrs. Payne said, so true it is that one's reputation commences or closes at the ale-house. The fact was the Minister saw the state of affairs, the dead-alive stagnation of the place, and in his humble way would help; and it won for him a friend and well-wisher in this sour-looking landlady. Mrs. Payne's face assumed a gracious smile when the stranger solicited hospitality; yes, he could have every accommodation, should receive the best attention, would be very comfortable. Of that he expressed himself assured, and all being amicably arranged, he entered the parlor, where the smith, the sexton, and three or four others were just finishing the evening posset before going home to bed. All rose at the stranger's entrance: it was so uncommon an event, and this was so unusual-looking a personage, that he was received with much deference.

"Good-evening, friends—hope all are well—glad to meet you! Pretty place, this—bracing hills—one or two fine old houses. Can I offer you some tobacco, Sir? And" (to another) "I'll trouble *you* for a light."

They were much taken by his free-and-easy manners, and were sociable enough, inviting him to join them in a quart of half-and-half. The friendly stranger explained that in his country it was usual for the new-comer to stand treat, and said he should feel pleasure doing so; whereat the smith said he saw the instant he entered the parlor that he was a gentleman, and the sexton rapped on the table with his knuckles in corroborative approval. When the glasses had been duly replenished one of the company brought out an old box of dominoes (pleasures were simple in this Arcadian vale), and very soon the sport ran high, tongues wagging like threshing-machines on a variety of rural topics, of particular interest to Mr. Noel Barnard, who was agreeably enlightened respecting the private and family matters of short-horn cows, fat hogs, South Down sheep, cart stallions, harness nags and cobs, Jersey cattle, and other stock; also upon agricultural details, such as the all-important subject of manure, one gentleman affirming barley manure to be useless thereabouts, another deciding there was no raising beans without it. One of the speakers had tried top-dressing, and found it satisfactory, and turned to the visitor, "You're in favor of top-dressing, Sir?" "I—oh, very much so!" and harmony still prevailed, the domino contest included, despite the excitement of the sexton, who had made a run with double-blank three times in succession, such a thing as had never happened to him all the time he had played dominoes. Soon the discussion turned to implements—broadshare, drill, plough, harrow, roll, oil-cake breaker, hurdles, troughs, pulpers, and chaff-cutters; and a respected yeoman, laying down his church-warden pipe, said to the visitor, "I hear there's a new chaff-cutter about, Sir; mayhap you've seen it?" "I think I have," said the artistic gentleman, with much civility, and then gently led the conversation in the direction of the village, concerning which these good folk, never tiring of talking of what little there was to talk about, entertained him with the full account. First, of the great preacher who had come to live among them, and some were loud in praise; some, busied watching the absorbing game, said nothing. The visitor, in an impressive manner, remarked, "Why, surely this isn't the man who's been going on so queer with his curate's daughter? Same name, comes from Brighton, odd thing, too! Sad affair, hushed up, can't appear in public. Poor girl! awfully sorry for her; never had a sister, but feel for her; dreadful thing!" Of course all were agog at this; commend us to a village for epicurism in such matters. The story was set going now, by the morrow it would be all over the village. The serpentine limbs of the artist coiled around the ash-trays under the table and closed, while with grim setting of the teeth he looked the meaning he would not express by speech. The game was neglected, pipes were taken from mouths, the pewter tankards were put down, and the villagers stared without remark. At last the sexton, the wiseacre of the party, spoke, "Well, if that's it, I think they might have staid at Brighton. It's wonderful the wickedness about!"

"What's all this you tell me about the owner of the old house I passed coming into the village?" asked the guest.

"Measter Hamilton, full o' book-larning; well, he's very peculiar, gruff, and surly like, but it comes o' always studying, leastways so we hear. He's mighty clever, they do say knows every mortal thing; and it's rich too he is; has a power o' money, and don't hesitate to spend it. Some o' the big parcels that come to him from Brighton would make your eyes open: scientific instruments, we've been told. He's something of a philosopher, I think they call it; fond o' the wonderful, deals in mysteries, and reads the stars."

"Bless my soul, so did my mother; very clever at it; know a thing or two myself; we shall get on well together. I'll call on the old fellow; be a charity, I should think."

And they looked at this bold and confident stranger with a little wonder but with much respect, and said, "He's a curious sort of person to call on, he is!"

Shortly afterward the company turned out and the guest was conducted to his chamber; a pleasant room, snowily clean, with a cheerful fire blazing away in the capacious grate.

The long-legged gentleman sat down and warmed his feet.

"Guess I'll astonish this recluse, possibly get something out of him" (Mr. Barnard always had an eye to business; it was in the blood). "Fond of the occult, is he? Good! A disciple of the marvellous? Better! An adept at the mysterious? I'll cap him! My Indian experience may come in here."

He next made a tour round his room; he wanted something to read a while before this cheerful fire. He tried the top drawer of the chest, it was locked; tried the next, it yielded; contents, a circular from a pig-trough maker, some shells, a short pipe, the handle of a whip, a reel of cotton, a fish-hook, a cough lozenge, an old memorandum-book, a thimble, a piece of slate-pencil, and a packet of seed. "Very interesting," having made an inventory; "glad they didn't lock this lot up. Well, what's the bid?" With much liveliness he tried the drawer below, and discovered one shawl, one black paramatta dress, one roll of crape flouncing, one card-board box containing mourning collars and cuffs, and one small box of black pins. "Poor soul!" said the commiserating Mr. Barnard; "lost her husband. Astonishing the number of souls I come across who *have* lost their husbands! Very depressing for me—very!" and with the oddest expression possible to conceive he shut the drawer up again. The inquirer turned his attention to the beauties of the side-table by the window: artificial flowers under a glass, model of a ship, and a small dog with two heads. Next to the mantel: fac-simile, possibly, of the South Down shepherd of the period wrought in china, his mate opposite with the nose off, and in the centre an old brown mug, pastoral period likewise. He then opened the window and leaned his head out.

All was very quiet, yet does a village never present the dead stillness of the country-town at night; there is always some faint sound, some sign of movement. Near by was a shed, in which the cattle were restless; the wind from over the hills and off the sea stirred the leaves and scattered the straw in the yards; pigeons made a low cooing; the strong-throated weasel, after corn and mice, uttered its curious squeak; the poultry-yard at the rear of the inn was fluttered; and in the distance was heard the solemn measure of the waves breaking upon the dusky shore. Those were the sounds. The sights were these: A village street, rows of low-pitched cottages, a few houses of a better order, the farmsteads, the two peaceful edifices—the village church and the pastor's manse—and the great old house where the scholar dwelt, and where the sole light visible shone at the window of his study. "It would be interesting to know," thought the gazer, "how much our learned recluse will credit without doubting the word of a gentleman and a traveller. Also if he is disposed to defray the cost of an expedition of enterprise."

With a sanguine smile he turned from contemplation of the hushed scene, from the little settlement which, for its quaintness, might have come down from days of "Hawkynge" glory, when "gentil knyghts" were equally at the service of the House of Lancaster for sport or for combat; when the Downs and downland villages were picturesque with gay companies, with horses, dogs, and music. Now the acres upon acres of wild flowers are all untrampled upon, except where the flocks dotting the hill-sides trail off for sweeter pasturage. The sweep of clear green space preserves its own records unwritten, save on the folding leaves of the one great book; no man has troubled to collect the archives of this realm of the solitary herdsman; chroniclers are too busy with the towns, historic sites, and the ancient work of builders' hands.

Mr. Barnard arose early and went for a bracing walk along their ridges, having ordered his breakfast to be ready by half past nine o'clock. It was piercingly cold upon the heights, a keen and cutting December wind smiting the hills as though to cleave them asunder. The vigorous pedestrian smiled good-humoredly in the face of it, and performed his constitutional to a rood, ay, and enjoyed it, returning at length, all aglow from one end of his long form to the other, and to find the village warmly sheltered even from December northeast winds. The sun was smiling full upon the little place, and a very different scene was presented to that of the preceding night. His inn peeped forth at one end of the street, lozenge-latticed, thick on the garden side with winter roses; JABEZ PAYNE, LICENSED, etc., over the door; a swinging sign bearing THE GRANGE INN, in discolored art; to the rear he smelled pigs, saw Alderney cows, and heard a hound. Mr. Barnard slightly extended his walk; it wanted three minutes to the time appointed for his breakfast; he was very punctual always. "Cook the eggs a minute or two less if one goes in before the time," he used to say. A man was riding the foremost of a team down to the pond. The steady clang of iron on iron came from the smithy. The stranger walked down the street, and the village stared at the stranger; the stranger returned the compliment by staring at the village; the village had never been so stared at before, and went in-doors again; the stranger pursued his way. He came to the fisher colony; nets were hanging on the outer walls, boats were drawn up near by, conical baskets formed pyramids by the doors, grubby-mouthed young of the fisher colony sported upon the oyster shells and shingle. Thence he betook himself to the garden gate of the Bishop's House, a romantic edifice by all lights; gabled, overrun with ivy, with dead gleaming of old red bricks put together when the Tudors played at art patronage. "Return after breakfast," said the artist, and went back to do justice to Mrs. Payne's liberal providing.

True to his word, he returned after breakfast, and galvanized the elderly, low-speaking woman who appeared at his summons. She informed him that her master would see no one, and was deeply engaged.

"So am I," said Mr. Barnard, with a sly look at the decorous domestic, and placing a half crown in her hand. "Engaged to see Mr. Hamilton."

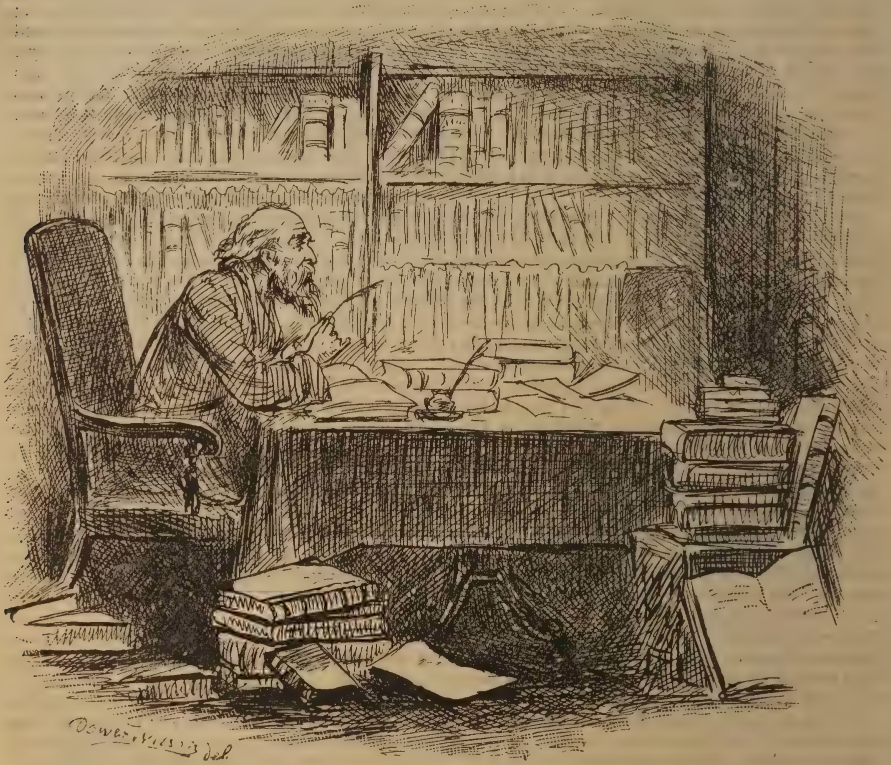
With much gravity she returned his guerdon, saying, "I will, if you please, tell my master you wish so particularly to see him," and departed upon her errand, but presently returned to say her master knew nothing of the person's business; whatever it was, he must communicate it in writing.

"Right you are," said Mr. Barnard, and taking out his pocket-book, he tore therefrom a leaf, upon which he wrote this mystical announcement: "*Eastern Traveller, twenty years incarcerated under-ground by hitherto unknown race; terrible story; recently arrived in England; would be obliged by an immediate audience.*" It seemed such a queer affair altogether, and it was so very possible the stranger *had* landed at Newhaven and walked over the Downs hither, that Mr. Hamilton gave permission for him to be admitted, and received him in the library, where a large fire lighted up the backs of solid walls of books, and glimmered upon the scholar's rugged face, lending it a color not its own.

"My scribbled mem.—very unceremonious, Mr. Hamilton—hope you'll excuse it; thought it might explain better than servant—like servants very much, but can't deliver messages. Heard of your profound learning—thought you would like to hear tremendous experience, of which I have been the victim, and that you might help me by advice, perhaps take sufficient interest to do something in it. Untold riches—fabulous wealth; plate your South Downs with gold from one end to the other!"

"Would you have any objection, Sir, to lowering your voice, which may or may not be an unpleasant one, but which strikes me as singularly discordant? I hate voices."

"So do I, but we can't do without 'em—used to be worse—old German fellow just found out animals talked originally—awful jargon—fancy a field full of dairy-maids and cows!"


Dower Wilson del.

"IN THE USUAL OLD CHAIR, LOST IN A REVERIE."

"You will excuse me, but do you mind talking slowly and as consecutively as possible? You will find the hills—"

"Know all about it—magnificent—been up there this morning—bird's-eye view of your house from the summit—very fine. 'There,' said I, 'dwells one to whom learning is as a handmaiden!'"

He was stretching out his hands to the fire, his thin face came out profiled upon the books; he looked a thinker, he was decidedly eccentric. One way and another the recluse had not been so impressed of late years as upon this occasion. But his legs fidgeted Mr. Hamilton very much, for first one and then the other embraced the fire, then darted off in a tangent like javelins; and then they went together, as though both were going up the chimney; then one slipped somewhere under the chair, but where, was a problem, while the other glided under a table near; and all with such active and rhythmical spontaneity that the student thought this person must be all legs, and looked at him with considerable curiosity; at the same time it amazed him greatly, and he politely asked—

"Do you think you could keep your legs still five minutes?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Barnard, "unless walking about all the time—born like it—when quite an infant skipped like a flea—bound to be a great traveller every one said—and public voice spake truth—been every where."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Sir, and I'm a man of very few words, but you adopt an extravagant phraseology peculiarly offensive to me."

"Gift of the gab—I know—don't mind me—can't hurt my feelings—haven't got any. Tell you this story slow as I can; won't take long—feel certain you'll move in the matter."

"It's doubtful if I shall ever be still again," muttered Geoffrey Hamilton, with a morose look at the other's legs.

"I mean that you will move the Government. *I* can't—no influence—won't notice my letters—

hard done by—subject of the Queen too—in some countries, you know, lead to a war; but to a man of pluck and some capital this offers inducement to take more than ordinary interest."

"I have neither, Sir, and am not likely to aid your proposals in any way. I avoid business and the busy; my object is to live retired."

"I won't trespass upon your studious privacy long; just hear what I've got to say, and tell me what you think afterward." And, without waiting for permission, Mr. Barnard commenced one of those narratives of Oriental extravagance in which he delighted, during which Mr. Hamilton sat, immeasurably astonished, while his visitor critically observed the effect of his powers of invention.

"Do you seriously wish me to believe the astounding and, to put it expressively, as it seems to me, lying relation I have just heard?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"To be sure I do. Never mind expression; not surprised you speak out! What do you think my feelings can be?"

"I don't know what they have been, if you have gone through all that you describe; but it strikes me as being very like a piece of outrageous fiction."

"So it does me; so it would any one; but let somebody go there and prove it for the satisfaction of this country. There's an opening at Elephanta for inquiry, I do assure you. I don't present this before you as an interested person, as a poor person, or as a person wishing to conduct any investigation connected with the matter; I've had quite enough of it. I simply recount what has been, and what is, and I can only say I shall be happy, if any thing is done in the matter, to subscribe, say, £500, toward prosecuting a disinterested inquiry. This I will place in the hands of my solicitor, Mr. O'Connor, of Chancery Chambers, Cursitor Street, who will, I am sure, oblige me by receiving subscriptions to be paid in to the account of the Elephanta inquiry."

"What you have said, Sir, sounds fair and reasonable. Perhaps you will give me your solicitor's address in writing?"

"Certainly, if you wish it." And the visitor wrote it down, Mr. Hamilton meantime thinking, possibly, the gentleman's experience might have had something to do with the chronic restlessness to which he seemed to be subject.

"I should think," said the gentleman, looking up carelessly, "if I give five hundred, and you give five hundred, we might manage it between us, and retain the prestige; for if once it's known the initiative is taken, troops of adventurers will rush in and want to share the spoil."

"I'm not aware that I said I was going to do any thing of the kind, Sir!" and with an irritable movement the master doubled the written paper, and put it in his pocket-book.

"Neither did I; these things want well looking at; so many men who can afford it better, and I think it's more their duty than either yours or mine. One of us with his learning, the other with his art, has quite enough to attend to; but I'll be off up the hill; I love these windy heights."

"I wish you good-morning!" The student bowed abruptly, clutching nervously at his dressing-gown, and with an irregular jolt quitted the library, proceeding to his private retreat above, while the decorous domestic opened the door for the stranger. Mr. Hamilton was very much annoyed. That any person should profane the retirement of the Bishop's House, and intrude upon his seclusion, for the purpose of imposing upon his credulity, seemed such an outrage as to be barely possible. On the other hand, the visitor's narrative had been so singular a jumble of Hindoo reality and fable, Mr. Hamilton could not restrain himself from falling into irritable consideration of its purport. In the usual old chair, lost in a reverie wherein scholarship and science blended, while the grim mythology of India seemed to loom upon the dusky walls, tiers of old books, lofty and massive, took rocky semblance, and by the vacant gaze through half-closed lids grew like some giant deity of the cave temples, of whose marvels and hidden treasures the person had talked until the recluse could scarcely sit under the infliction. The mystical traditions of the East had always a fascinating attraction for the inwrapped scholar, well versed in its ancient literatures. The visitor had woven imagery of his own with the rich colors of Indian romance, and hung the highly wrought tapestry upon weird rocks of the colossal temples, and so vividly that Geoffrey Hamilton had almost been transported to those shadowy interiors, and stood in awe before the mighty achievements of primeval sculpture.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GRANGE FIRESIDE.

Hawkingdean Grange did not impress Constance Evelyn with the gloomy feelings other people regarded it with. There was a shadowy effect about it, but this to her represented the poetic, the historic, the romantic, not the superstitious. The recesses of the tangled garden, with the plantation thick with fir-trees and soft with dropped cones, was a beautiful retreat to this bright young spirit that had roamed the dusky fragrant ways of Bournemouth and Torquay. The Moat was a place of wonders; those giant reeds that smote each other with a cross-ways rhythm, the sullen water with its freightage of lilies and broad leaves, and trail of attendant weed, the wild fowl that flew from her approach, the dismantled water-gate and arch with its festooned ivy and bind-weed, were all very beautiful and, when she had overcome the sense of loneliness, most pleasant. She had not devoted time to reading poetry or romances—Mr. Evelyn considered both unfitted for the conscientious training of a clergyman's daughter—but she possessed the love of both as developed by nature and in age. This wild, deserted place was lovely in her eyes, and here opened the dream-time that comes but once in life.

There was a startling measure of happiness about this coming to Hawkingdean, and since unable to quit it she lived forth the dream with such pure delight as only those know who are unspoiled by the world and humanity as was Constance Evelyn. She had resisted it, struggled against any such possibility as this, would have fled from the destiny which was enveloping her, but whither? She tried to be cold with him, but what was coldness opposed to such infinite tenderness as was his? She sought to assume indifference if not dislike, but what hollow acting it must seem and how despicable she must appear in his eyes, she feared. It was useless, it was impossible. They met in the comfortable old-fashioned drawing-room; she was at needle-work when he arrived, coated and snow-sprinkled; the sight of her face, which he had not seen for a long time, beside the fire recalled his home, and he was moved by emotion. He went up to her, gave her his hand, and kissed her upon the brow—she had been the playmate of his child. Constance was equally affected, but shook off the feeling and bustled about seeing to his comfort; and it was like another place with her in it, so much does a face, a presence, lend to the magic which is the enchantment of home.

When they had settled down it seemed like old times: he with his thoughtful considerate courtesy, she with her pensive beautiful regard; he studious, happier for her presence; she with her timid dream silvering and making light the edges of life's clouds, and delighting in her quiet servitude.

One morning among the Minister's letters was one from a correspondent too humble to append his name: "*Will Mr. Garland bestow a word or two of encouragement upon one struggling upward, but who is very faint, and who fears sinking upon the way? No money needed.*" It pleased the preacher, and he sent to the address given under initials this response: "*Have faith in God, have faith in self, and fear not.*" It was concise, yet a message; and it was all-eloquent. "Mine is a large, rich, but unclarified nature," once said Margaret Fuller; "my history presents much superficial, temporal tragedy. The woman in me kneels and weeps in tender rapture; the man in me rushes forth, but only to be baffled. Yet the time will come when from the union of this tragic king and queen shall be born a radiant sovereign—self." At the commencement of this crusade Garland had set himself the Herculean labor—not of conquering self, but of creating a self of imperishable structure. Under the severe simplicity of Westley Garland's life there was poetry; through all his writings, subservient to stern control, was imagination; but mark, subservient. A thought would here and there flash on the page or from the pulpit, glowing as the jewel-breast of a bird beneath a song, but it was to link with electric love two worlds. His theology was not that of telling the number of golden square feet paving the heaven of the righteous, it was, "Heaven is there—seek it, learn its wonders for yourself; they are not to be told here." Yet no man could have told their fancied glories with more exquisite delight; but such colorings would not be grounded upon implicitness, and therefore would not do for him nor others; by his reasoning the same principle applied in the matter of his style. The silver speech of the ancients was noticeably absent from his discourse. The plains of Marathon pale before the Garden of Gethsemane, as the splendor of the Crescent pales before the white banner of the Cross. There was rapture tremulous on the lips of dying children, and this was the modern eloquence more silver to his ears. He possessed a wonderful and sad tenderness that was like unto an odor that breathes upon us from long years through old letters, or some relic carefully kept away—maybe a piece of blue ribbon, a little girl's sash, or a baby's sock—which, when brought forth in some quiet, sacred moment, speaks to the heart through the old odor weighted with long-dead kisses and such caresses as shall never come again. Or more happily it may be likened to a hue which is scarcely a tint, barely a shade, far removed from the strength of color. Hue, that is the invalid delicacy of color; a hectic loveliness like the very spirit of color glowing at a distance; the maidenhood of shadow first shrinking from the light. In nature it will take form in that vivid living pink born of the death of the sun, when the last flushing has fled from the sky. Do you recall that light in your lost child's eyes when they looked up in yours? it was sharp and swift and never to be forgotten, but withal tender beyond the telling: only a hue, strongly defined as it was; one you have been hungrily searching for ever since in strange eyes, and have never found. Fruit pieces, with the magic name of *Lance* somewhere curving under broken trails of vine, are tender-hued with that indefinable consummate expression we call, for better name, the bloom.

Allied to this tenderness was refined taste, regulating every action. Taste is the etiquette of delicacy—the nice perception of the most sensitive part of human nature. It is the sensibility of haughtiness toned by gracious forethought. By polite ethics it would be "bad taste" to visit the poor and do all that this minister did; but his was of a different order of taste to that, being allied to tenderness.

It had all come of that creation of Self. Time had been when he was impetuous as the rest of us, was infirm as most; but he had undergone an ordeal that expunged the inequality. Now Deed was not less in his hand than Thought. Achievement in all that it worked for itself, selfishly, was discarded, and sent with Exploit to the limbo of unused effort. In their place he used Action as an agent ever in subjection.

It was the fashion to quote, to admire, and to eulogize this cultured writer and speaker, but it had a beginning when he came from out of the crowd, or from out of the pathless solitudes, or from the woods, or the sea, or forth from some huge city. How often is the *earlier* era known? Men discover the teacher or the singer for themselves, and leave his novitiate of struggle and agony until long after, when his story is written and his name goes down on the scroll; so here the Unknown spake, men listened, women loved, and the cultured, as quick to discover culture as to detect *mauvais ton*, instinctively became friends with the stranger. His Heronby and Guilmere credentials would have failed of accomplishing this unless allied with that power no credential confers. Really he cared little for the measure of popularity acquired; it was the measure of good he was enabled to do. A home wreck will often produce a living soul that shall draw souls unto it, and guide such on to safety: this is the solution of the mysterious ends permitting such catastrophe; all grand character has undergone awful and fiery ordeal, and until then it is but forming. Possibly the secret of Garland's success reposed in its tenderness—a quality very absent from modern experience. Woman loves this especially, and it was immediately recognized in the new speaker. Such as the tender Son of God preached, a divinity of delicate care for those essentially needing tenderness; a language of exquisite solicitude, musical with sensitive thoughtfulness; and from the time when He lived one lovely epic—half a dream of tender thought for our earthly well-being, half an ideal of the heaven he would have us live—there has been but too little imitation of this more gentle quality. Gentleness and charity are akin to tenderness, and share in the ministry of love. This preacher possessed these, and with them a sensitiveness that was peculiar, with nothing of sentiment about it, or shrinking, or straining for sympathy; it was a sensitiveness of tenderness that a word might wound; of affection, a look might warp; of love, a thought might cause to recoil; of courtesy, a misunderstanding might crush.

It was characteristic and English that some people who could find no flaw or blemish in his life, no defect or weakness in his books, discerned a certain extravagance in his *titles*—thought them misleading, sometimes far-fetched. Really his titles were secondary, but he never lied under their cover; he held, indeed, that a title, like a face, should be prepossessing to win favor; it might also, he thought, be graceful, to dwell upon the mind and linger long on the memory pleasantly. He considered it a card of introduction, which should be unique, and should possess a beautiful concentricity, or a sign indicating the character of the entertainment within, which ought therefore to be in accord with good taste and the etiquette of refinement. He deemed it the sensitive point of consistence between the writer and the public, believing good faith to be as requisite as fine delicacy. Like a Christian name, being most frequently used, it should be harmonious and winsome, for the affection of those often with it. As some hand-post directing the region to be traversed, or the ship's book giving testimony of some prominent fellow-voyager, it decides the prepossessions almost immediately. He further thought that, like titles with men, it should ennoble, be worthy of its inner self, as its inner self should be worthy of it. These were his opinions upon the title question, privately entertained and acted upon; in spite of which he had been unfortunate enough to hit upon "far-fetched" and "extravagant" ones; and it is astonishing how few of us really can rejoice over having thought of every thing that will be agreeable to our critics. How men would like each to be a little Providence to direct and ordain the well-being or the reverse of his fellows and their affairs! Addison said, "There is no defense against reproach but obscurity; it is a kind of concomitant to greatness, as satires and invectives were an essential part of a Roman triumph." How contradictory! here was a man emerged from obscurity to greatness to escape reproach: this is reversing the order of things, and outraging the essayists entirely. Surely the man should learn a sharp lesson from it.

Failing his titles, they quarrelled with his invention: he was too imaginative, should have kept his fancy in a cage, like a tamed rat, and held his poetry down with rasping chains. People of the Wriggle genus pronounced it all foolery, but none the less significant of the ways of Belial; styled him the follower of Baal, and discovered a striking resemblance between him and Balaam. People higher in the intellectual scale thought his style a little florid, and argued upon the "matter-of-fact" premise; they were of opinion that this is not a poetic age, and held that the man with imagination which he dared to foist upon his fellows was a sort of illegitimate poet, with a wallet of contraband picturing without the necessary license. Others held the imaginative faculty to be a species of ulcer of the mind—man to be avoided accordingly. Others appraised it as clap-trap of the tricksters, to be discountenanced strongly. The man with imagination has more enemies than the man with none. The property of invention is a mark of genius and a sign of power: it exalts its possessor to a position of exclusion, whereby he is safe from the approach of imitative followers; it stamps him by letters patent king of a country his own by discovery. A man may be a poet; a poet may be what is called great without it, but with it he is more—a composer, a creator. As soon forbid the man to think, and lock his poor writing apparatus away, as banish his fancy and control his invention. But if titles, and style, and imagination found enemies, his religion found many friends, since it rested upon the basis of yielding much to others and reserving little for himself.

After a day or two the reserve Constance had felt passed away, and she could enter into the domestic duties and the intellectual periods in his company without restraint. With freedom returned confidence; she could talk to him as in the old days, when he had been her adviser in matters of difficulty, the guide in matters of study, and the strong one to whom all her childish perplexities and troubles had been whispered. At that day Lionel had little else to do, save devote himself to making wife and child and this gentle companion of both happy as the birds of spring-time.

One evening Constance indirectly alluded to Ella; she wished to draw the conversation in the direction of the lady and her child, but scarcely knew how to set about it with sufficient delicacy. He fathomed her wish, and with a voice that trembled slightly, entered upon the topic.

"You have been surprised, Constance, at finding me prominent in the world, and in the possession of wealth and honor, without the dear partner of my life being with me to share it? Allow me to go back in my history to the sad time of our trouble. This, you are aware, arose out of serious embarrassments. In the earlier years of our married life we entertained much company, and lived beyond limit of the economy demanded by the property left me by my mother. My tastes and pursuits, and a too warm-hearted hospitality, straitened my means, and with the endeavor to improve them in an evil moment I listened to the plausible counsel of one of our visitors, a man who professed much friendship, but whom I afterward discovered to be in league with a persistent enemy who had resolved, and who really did accomplish, my ruin. This false adviser introduced to my consideration certain pretended philanthropic speculations which were to increase my slender wealth and perpetuate my honor; they enveloped me in debt and covered me with dishonor. At that day I had not the financial knowledge I have since taken the pains to acquire, and my comparative ignorance, joined to my anxiety to better the position in which I was so unfortunately placed, made me a ready prey. I kept all from my wife, hoping, with the pitiful despair of those whose very life depends upon result, to extricate myself, without causing her the distress of knowing all the full extent of our terrible extremity. Man's supreme province has always seemed to me to be the duty of shielding, of warding off trouble when possible, of keeping big sorrows to himself. The usurers, with whom, alas! one forms acquaintance even before the walls of the University are out of sight, were indefatigable with offers of temporary aid, and as a worse evil I fell into the clutches of these, and a gigantic fraud was perpetrated, by which, caught in the toils, I was brought within power of the archenemy of whom I have spoken. Then, indeed, my difficulties paralyzed me to contemplate. In that hour of thrice-felt horror and humiliation the speculations were brought up, and I was threatened with the additional exposure of common swindling. I was induced to place my affairs in the hands of an infamous attorney, and this misguided policy brought evils to their climax. Through it all I was unable to communicate with my father, owing to our unfortunate misunderstanding and the unrelenting nature of his feeling toward me in consequence.

"Ella learned that I was ruined, others might add dishonored. I could not, could not meet her sad questioning eyes, and fled as one accursed, although, God knows, my crime had been a light one. The coming ruin, and that looming ignominy which my enemy did not scruple to bring to my very door, filled my soul with a blackness of dread and sensitive anguish that must have unsettled my reason. Worn out by prolonged anxiety and suffering, unable to continue with my darlings so soon to be homeless, I at evening time quitted the dear old home, to return to it no more. I felt that once the cause of the enmity between us was removed, my father would forgive Ella and receive her with our child; the hovering disgrace would still further lessen his opinion of myself, but he might forgive her. Thus confronted by the horrible ordeal of the criminal courts if I remained, there was before me the alternative of flight or death. The former was more repulsive than the latter, for I was truly sick unto death of my life. Lost to surroundings in that morbid, brooding dejection, I took the lonely path leading from our garden to the sea, to find myself face to face with my enemy, prowling thereabout in expectation doubtless of my being driven to some such desperate course. With him was a man as fiend-like and more brutal. I would have avoided them, but they impeded my retreat, and by nameless insult goaded me to expression of my anger. I can not tell what I said or did, for between that dreadful time and now a merciful blank is interposed. I can recall the happiness of oblivion, the ecstasy of the total loss of remembrance. When consciousness returned it was to find myself the object of a ministering tenderness so pure and holy, it was as though I had been rescued from death and darkness by an instrument of Heaven itself. It was Lady Guilmere, of whom until then I knew but little, and was far from suspecting all the sublime depth of character. Her ladyship nursed me through stages not of bodily weakness only, but of mental crises also; she awakened hope, having saved life, revived interest, vital interest, in it, and filled my soul with a purpose. She had learned much in my delirium, and I told her all. I heard that the world supposed me dead. 'Now is the time,' said my friend, 'to commence life anew; with your talents and attainments under another name you may clear the honor of the old. Reveal your purpose to no one, not even to your wife at present; but enter boldly upon some public arena, and should your identity be discovered by any who have known you, take them into your confidence, or I will for you. A great future is open, avail yourself of it, trust in God, have faith in Him, have faith in self, and fear not.'

"It was a project of such daring there is no wonder if on the sick-bed I viewed it with doubt and hesitation; but as I recovered strength the old love of mine for the ministry was fanned into flame—a flame that will no more be extinguished this side the grave. I grew better quickly; the design, as she believed it would, fed my restoration to health.

"I intended only keeping the truth from Ella for a brief season while I was entering heart and soul into the work and preparing for our future. Of Lady Guilmere's sympathy, encouragement, and help, it is useless to attempt to speak; no description would exhaust it, nor do it justice. You know I am not impetuous; do nothing without well weighing consequences, and applying all the forethought possible. After mature deliberation and solemn conviction I accepted with new life, conferred after passing half-way through the shadowy valley, a new name, designing with this to restore the honor and fairness of the old, not only in the sight of my fellows, but also in that of my family, with whom I made the resolution not to communicate until I could do so without shame and suffering. I relied upon my father (when the cause of his grave anger should be no more) repenting of his sternness, and taking Ella and our little one to live with him at the Park. Alas for the fortitude of the heart when it has to struggle with the affections, I found my task beyond my strength! My whole soul went yearningly forth toward the dear ones. It would imperil the whole scheme probably, and render my labor of non-avail; but it was more almost than I could bear, to be separated from them. Prudence whispered, 'It is but for a little while; be firm, be patient; consecrate the present to the good work you are rescued from darkness to perform, and which shall lead you to the light fairer for the intermediate exercise of denial and devotion.' But my heart murmured, 'It is my wife, my child!' Then answered the new advocate, speaking for my duty and my honor, 'The service you are engaged upon is greater than any earthly tie!' and the passage in the Gospel would come vividly to mind, 'And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.' 'But,' I said, 'I have not done this; my sacrifice is of earthly and interested nature.' 'The grosser sacrifice,' replied the voice, 'is merged in the loftier priesthood, with abnegation of the old and creation of a new self.' Then, I said, I was a fugitive from suffering when called, at war with my own existence, and outraging my merciful Creator. 'So was Saul,' said the voice, 'a greater than thou in all bad deed and in all good work.' Then I put forward the secular work for the increase of money, and I received this reply, 'It is means to an end, and the end is good.' I left the argument, dedicated every energy to my ministry in the highest sense possible, endeavored to work good in conjunction with unselfish care for all, and, with the active business of an honest man, applied myself by every effort to increasing my store of treasury, wherewith to discharge the claim that wrecked our happy home. Man has sharp lessons to learn during life, but none more so than conquering the world, crucifying the flesh, and fighting the devil. Yet I am sorry to tell you, after it all, the chance resemblance to mine of some little one in my congregation leaves me weaker than any woman. So much for human nature; clearly the strength is unequal to that needed by the will. Were my darlings—for the present lost to me—only recovered, I fear my plans would crumble, every one of them, and I should waive all in my yearning to have them with me."

"I should think so," was the simple rejoinder, so softly uttered, yet so full of thought for the absent. There was a pause; then Constance said—

"I can not see it right at all; the woman is the helpmate, and her place is by her husband's side, if under a hundred names. Ella would not have refused to share this public exile, and, if necessary, for a time this change of name; and I can not see how her presence would have jeopardized new prospects."

"No," said the Minister, thoughtfully; "but you are looking at it from one side, and I from the other. I suffered more than you or any one could understand those last days at Torquay. To one of my nature it is *all* to stand in the presence of the loved without a reflection upon one's honor, and it was for this I designed to wait. Too late I learned that, through Ella's or my father's fault, the reconciliation I depended upon had not taken place, and that they had quitted the spot, no one knew whither, but not in poverty. I paid a flying visit to the old home, leaving money with my child. I hope the enemy who hath wrought this evil thing may never suffer the pangs I experienced that night of my visit to the despoiled home. It would pain your gentle soul were I to describe to you the scene."

"Yes. I called before it happened, and once afterward, but Ella would not see me."

"Poor thing! Poor thing! I understand it would be impossible."

"I think, for all you have said, it has been a hazardous experiment, which by a very narrow line is divided from being a cruel one. You were greatly loved."

What emotion was underlying her words, and how the love she herself felt came out upon the utterance!

"And to think I was so little worthy! Why, even our Constance, who loved me then, has turned colder to me now!"

She flushed, not daring to lift her eyes, but she was very honest and ingenuous, and replied, with an exquisite sincerity, "You mistake; I love you very dearly, shall love you all my life, more than any body in the world!" It terminated passionately, with an outburst of tears. He was greatly moved; there was such depth of devotion, such a world of long-treasured sacred idealism. It was grateful to him, fragrant as incense of lilies—it could not be otherwise loving her—but it was embarrassing and delicate, that no semblance of advantage should be taken, no shadow of encouragement be given, yet that this young fresh love should not be wounded, or even blown upon by a breath too cold and coarse in his opinion to come in contact, so rarely did he think of it. Imperceptibly he had become placed in a sensitive position when a movement either way seemed fraught with peril and outlined by pain. Eloquent as the words were, she had not thought to reveal her secret, but it was borne upon them as thistle-down is borne on summer air, and floated toward him lightly, beautifully, and unmistakably. How to act in this emergency of vibrating chords?

"It is kind of you to say so, and your words find responsive echo in my heart, with the tender caring love of some watchful brother whose affection could not be at once more pure, more binding. You will ever think of me, look on me, as one who gives you a heart's choicest and most affectionate sympathy. I will cherish the remembrance of this as one of the sacred experiences preserved in the hallowed recesses of my heart."

"And you will love me a little?"

"Always, Constance, as I would a sister, or some friend whose leaning upon me rendered the love sacred."

"Such love is worthless; a mere acquaintance may claim that. Yours should be different, for it represents all in the world worth living for, and I can't help saying so."

His pale cheek tinted a deepening glow while he replied—

"What can I say to you, how act, dear Constance? The treasure of your love is deeply welcome to me, and lightens up the weariness of life with more grateful pleasure than I can describe to you. I am all unworthy of it, and unable beyond the limits I have explained to return it; yet all that is mine to give is yours, and on those conditions I accept this young and beautiful affection, so pure and devoted. Do not fear; I will never divulge this sacred pledge, nor hold it valueless. So long as it is a joy to you this house shall be your home, I, all that you would wish. Ever alone, yet never alone, you may live upon earth a life consecrated to that ideal goodness, dim in every heart of girlhood, yet which few possess the courage to confirm as you have done. Ever lean upon me; I will never fail with my support."

Thus with gentle tact he placed that ideal goodness in advance of himself; then their talk wandered back to Ella; the haunting influence seemed to affect his every thought.

Constance resumed her work, happier; he was a confidant now, and that promise of his was sweet. She recovered her cheerfulness, and her eyes were often lifted all alight with gratitude and pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVER ALONE, YET NEVER ALONE.

"TO-DAY."

A letter addressed "Mrs. Esther Thompson, care of Sir Horace Vivian," had filled that lady with vague, unaccountable misgivings. A woman's handwriting, and signed "An Unknown Friend." She was to meet the writer if she would hear something of importance concerning the dead. The message was mysterious, unsettling; sufficient to send a flash of agony to heart and brain, but not sufficient to acquaint her with one particular, only that she was to meet the writer—"to-day." The appointment was to be held at a house in Gray's Inn Road, and the writer requested that strict confidence might be observed.

To decline going was impossible; worked up to a feverish pitch, utterly perplexed, wondering, distressed, the old wound re-opened, the great sorrow renewed, Mrs. Travers could but kiss her child with emotion, say she was only going a little way and would soon return, and hurry on. Ella was surprised by her mother's curious conduct and wished to accompany her, but this she would not permit.

Dull and lonely the child sat in their room awaiting her mother's return. Lady Vivian and her daughters had accompanied Sir Horace upon his morning drive, so the house seemed very still and dull. Presently a maid came to her, saying a person at the back entrance wished to speak with her.

Trembling, the child hastened to the court, where a respectable-looking woman held a letter. It was in the handwriting of her mother, and the child started with apprehension:

"Come to me at once, darling. I have sent the servant to bring you here."

"I will run and put on my hat and jacket."

"You will not be long, if you please, miss." Ella hastened away and returned almost immediately. The two set forth.

When Mrs. Travers arrived at the house of meeting, she was ushered into a shabby-genteel parlor, where an elaborately dressed female with a profusion of blonde hair received her politely, begging she would be seated, and closing the door with excess of care. This person, in whom the reader recognizes Mrs. Bartholomew Rolf, opened her business in what she was pleased to think was a business-like manner.

"When two women, madam, unacquainted with each other, meet upon a delicate subject, of vital interest to one of them, it is preferable to dispense with formality and speak to one another frankly, as two women may when confronted by calamity or discovery."

Mrs. Travers could only bow, astonished at this ominous preamble, her heart beating, and breathing with difficulty; she experienced the suffocating feeling so dangerous, but which happily does not visit one often.

"I must ask you to summon all your fortitude to your aid, and to suppress the natural weakness of our sex, which leads us to become hysterical when apprised of that which shocks."

"I promise to preserve my self-control, madam. I have been well disciplined in trouble, believe me." What blasting revelation touching poor Lionel's character and honor was forthcoming?

"As you may have gathered from my brief note, I am about to communicate something you should have known before. It concerns Mr. Lionel Travers!"

"I judged so. You will pardon me, I am suffering terrible suspense: do not prolong it unnecessarily."

"I am sorry to say I am compelled to do so, until we can send for your little girl; the child's presence is requisite."

"This is very strange," said Mrs. Travers, much surprised; "she wished to come with me, but I would not allow it. I shall prefer my child not hearing any reflection upon her dead father's honor."

"It is entirely in your own hands, madam, whether you hear it yourself. My time is much occupied, and I have none to waste. At some personal inconvenience I was about to do you a service—at least most women would take it in that light—but I am not in the least particular about it. Our interview can close, or you can write a line to your little girl; my servant will take it and bring the child at once."

The blonde arose impatiently, so as to intimate that she meant no nonsense, standing either to open the door or ring the bell. Writing materials were upon the table, and Mrs. Travers wrote that note. Of course this was a *ruse* to obtain possession of the child, who being secured elsewhere in the hands of Bartholomew, he sent the servant to her mistress to say that the young lady would rather not come with a stranger.

"I will go for her, I shall not be long," said Mrs. Travers, rising.

"Yes, but then we shall lose time. It is dreadfully provoking; perhaps, after all, I had better go on with it."

Again with excess of care she went to the door to see it was tightly fast and returned to her seat. Mrs. Travers's feelings all this time may be imagined.

"I shall be sorry," commenced the blonde, "to pain you, but can not altogether avoid it. Mine is an embarrassing duty, but I must execute it to the best of my poor ability. I am not a refined person, ma'am, was never educated in the delicate office of breaking news, good or bad, therefore if I'm blunt impute it to my ignorance. I will ask you first to think of all the bad ones you have ever heard of, with all the deceptions and impostures possible to recall, and it will in some way prepare you for the extraordinary piece of intelligence you are about to hear."

To describe the effect of this preliminary coarseness upon that sensitive lady would be out of the question; she was as one petrified. It seemed sacrilege; to listen to it, a heinous outrage. That such a preface should introduce aught of her dead hero, that idolized husband, whom she thought of as with the angels that should have been his earthly company, seemed such shocking desecration, that she was as one stricken by some sudden blow of so unusual a kind it could scarcely be realized. Her soul recoiled at the despoiling atmosphere, and she was completely prostrate.

"To some extent what I am about to say will appear incredible; fortunately I am prepared with testimony. When living at Eagle Hall for the last few years you were often visited by Miss Evelyn, a clergyman's daughter?"

"Miss Evelyn was my attached friend. I knew her from the time when she was quite a child."

"It was a dangerous acquaintance for your husband, who came to love this girl."

"My husband always loved her," replied Mrs. Travers, with composure, but speaking faintly. "Constance Evelyn was as one of our family."

"Your husband loved her with a guilty love—"

"That is untrue, most wickedly untrue!" cried the victim, writhing under this fiendish torture.

Without heeding the interruption Mrs. Rolf proceeded.

"And when, deprived of means, he could no longer provide for her, as even you know he had been wont to do—"

"My husband supplied the cost of her education, madam, about which I was first consulted."

The other plodded sturdily on with her narrative, regardless of the explanation. "He conceived a project of extravagant daring, and was successful in carrying it out. It was to counterfeit a suicide's death, begin life afresh under another name, which, assisted by influential accomplices, and making use of his cleverness and talent, was for him a matter of comparative ease. Then, with money, and released from yourself and your child, he was at liberty to take any license. He took it, sent for the girl, and is living with her now in the most strict retirement."

Oh no, she was not to faint under this! Would such relief could have been! With veins like knotted cords, and fiery currents making her feel how life may know sharp anguish when to faint would be to rest, she was exquisitely alive to the instant torture of that moment.

It took a little while to comprehend the extreme meaning. There were two most wonderful revelations. To be told that Lionel lived was so amazing and sudden a disclosure as almost to benumb the faculties and prevent consciousness of that other most wretched charge; but as that, too, dawned upon her mind, and with it the thought that an unusually bad man *might* perform under exceptional circumstances what had been attributed to him, she sickened before the whole, but only one instant; then she rose from her seat, and calmly thanked the woman for her unsolicited information.

"What you have told me, madam, has not made me much happier. If you are deceiving me, I doubt if forgiveness will be extended for so dark a sin; if not, and you be instead deceived, think for an instant of my suffering now, who loved him with a tenderness surpassing that common in the world. You did not know him, or, even in error, or even purposely, you would not trifle with his name or with his memory. But all you have uttered is so improbable that its falseness is borne upon the face of it. I put it to you, does it sound reasonable, madam? Admitting all of it, I know his love for me and for our child was such that he *could not*, if for that alone, act as you say."

"Well, it's very soon settled and proved, and without great inconvenience to yourself. A journey will do it, of fifty miles by rail and some half dozen by hired vehicle, and I will show you the man himself and the girl; not, mark you, in any uncertain, accidental company, but alone together, by their own fireside, and comfortable enough, I bet a crown, while the good wife's out at service!"

The lady's eyes flashed angrily; this was no small threat; its tremendous yet vulgar sarcasm might have goaded a saint; it literally seemed to turn the whole current of this lady's being. Trembling from head to foot with agitation, and scarcely able to address the other with common civility, she contrived to say, "If that is to be seen, I most certainly ought to see it. I will go with you; let us not lose one minute. I am dressed and ready to depart, now, now; or will you unsay the dreadful words, tell me you have deceived me, that you are in error, that my hearing is failing me, that one of us is mad?"

"No, thank you, I would rather not. You must have patience; one can't start on a journey like this as though merely going to the Strand; another thing, you surely don't suppose I am doing you this friendly service for the love of you, whom I don't care the snap of a finger for? A variety of people have their price and I have mine, and I'm the last person in the world to work for nothing. Jewelry's cheap enough, but dress and fashion's expensive, and must be kept up, together with an establishment, to say nothing of supporting a carriage, for one can't go trailing skirts through London mud when it's possible to ride. I must know first what you'll consider my reward."

This was candor with a vengeance, the very brutality of business. Poor soul! she had little to give, only the few miserable pounds she had scraped together to assist in clearing the debts of loved, lost Lionel. But she was told he lived, had wealth; she would not need them then, and she laughed bitterly. In her heart, however, she did not credit the woman's word; some common adventuress living by her wits, who had discovered her sorrow and would make market of her grief; but those savings were too hardly got together to be parted with so easily; she just said—

"I will go with you, and return with you. *If* what you say be true, the little in my possession shall be yours."

"Well, I suppose I must be content with that. You've enough for our return first-class fares?"

"I don't know how much it is; I have a couple of pounds in my purse."

"We shall manage, I dare say. I'll go and put my things on."

She went and put her things on, and was a long time about it; then came down and invited the lady to have some bottled beer, which, being declined, the energetic Mrs. Rolf quaffed the contents of the bottle herself. In the passage she took affectionate farewell of a showily dressed girl, of some fourteen years, whom, next to extensive display in the matter of apparel, she was more fond of than any thing else in the world. A very pretty, very bold and self-confident, very superficial, very noticeable, very forward, yet, when she liked, very pleasing girl; and, after making allowance for her miserable, frivolous, and sinful bringing up, in no sense so bad as might have been expected, either in morals or manners. One of the problems of the great city is, how a child, reared from the first in an atmosphere of depravity, surrounded by every abominable influence, with her natural protectors, who ought to be an example, setting a pattern of odious type, as is often seen, how such a one acquires or preserves a particle of good. This young person was known as Edith Lessie, her mother, before the Bartholomew Rolf era, having been familiarly known upon the turf as the wife of James Hart Lessie, the notorious betting man, who committed suicide after a fearful run of ill-luck. His lady (who, by-the-way, did not wait for this, but decamped with characteristic foresight immediately the fortune began to turn) transferred her affections with her millinery bills, and threw the child in, to Bartholomew Rolf, who became the possessor of the lot. It proved a very bad lot, but in this they were well mated. Mr. Lessie had been a mere ordinary blackleg; Mr. Rolf was an accomplished scoundrel in the very zenith of his villainy; and Mrs. Lessie, who admired this sort of thing, held her present owner in becoming respect.

In this rank garden flourished the poor flower which, with other cultivation, would have been one of singular grace; yet all the beauty and freshness remained, and the child was growing with many a seed of good hidden away from sight, notwithstanding that she feared Bartholomew and despised her mother.

Mrs. Rolf led the way to an adjoining cab-rank, and selected a yellow hansom, in which they were driven to London Bridge, the lady leaning back with a handkerchief to her face, and exchanging no word with her unsympathetic companion. At the terminus, Mrs. Rolf, without ceremony, purchased a traveller's bottle of brandy, and thus provided for the journey seated herself with an air of comfort, the quivering, shaken mortal before her, faint with agony of mind and horrible suspense, feeling half unable to enter upon that hour or more of waiting. It seemed a long and terrible journey, made doubly long by the uncertainty attending its issue. Mind upon the rack the whole way, eyes never daring to lift to the kind gaze of strangers, who saw this was no common trouble, and would have interchanged some word of interest and pity. A wearying time, all linked from beginning to end with stifling pangs, leaving her weak and smitten upon arrival.

The guide hired a vehicle, asking the driver his fare to some place, the name of which the lady failed to hear, and they were driven down a street known as Trafalgar Street, which is one of the main thoroughfares to and from the station, and communicates with the northern division of the town. Past an elegant church, one of Sir Charles Barry's graceful poems in stone, past a wide space planted round with a double avenue of trees, they reached higher ground, where a line of elms bordered a pathway, and in summer-time yielded pleasant shade to the row of houses built upward on the high and healthy site; at the end of this was a noble building, for extent, situation, and architecture having no equal in the kingdom. The woman with blonde hair, on putting her head out of the carriage window and asking what the building was, learned this to be the work-house, whereat she withdrew suddenly. In a few minutes they were upon a white road traversing the height of downland, a superb extent of scenery outspread on either hand: one had no soul for this, the other no heart, and the verdant panorama was unrolled for nothing; still, the keen fresh air revived the lady, and the clearer blue, the fairer light, even of brilliant transparency in the afternoon, seemed to speak to her troubled spirit and to say, "Be not mocked, however gloomy thy life; a clear beyond awaits thee; there are heights as well as depths. Heaven is bright as ever it was; it is only the fleeting clouds prevent its being seen."

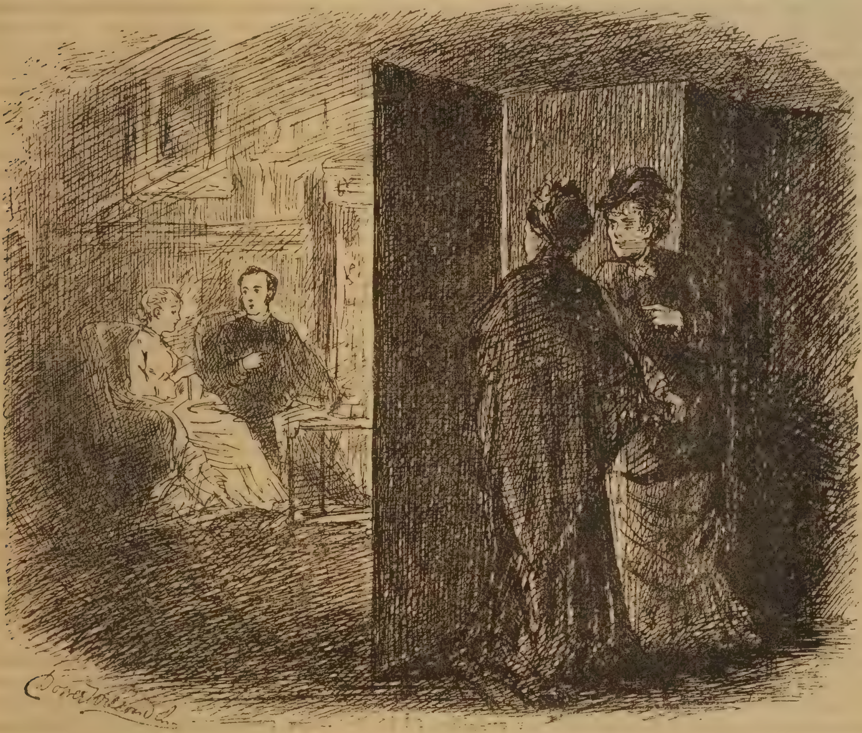
It seemed a long drive, the way by road was circuitous, but they reached the village between five and six o'clock, putting up at the Grange Inn, the landlady thereof herself going to the door to receive her distinguished guests. In her opinion the showy lady was evidently the mistress and the other the maid, and the blonde, in consequence, met with obsequious attention, pleasing her much. The lady was thus enabled to escape to their chamber, where once alone she burst into a flood of passionate tears, and experienced their saving relief. The dressy lady down stairs explained they were not going to stay all night, but would require tea, after which they were going to make a call; and upon their return would want some brandy and water and biscuits, and the horse to be put in immediately for their journey back, all of which Mrs. Payne engaged to have done.

It was evident to Mrs. Payne that the Grange Inn was rising in popularity, was becoming known, would go down to posterity in guide-books and Bradshaw as one of the famous hostelries of the world; and Mrs. Payne resolved to spare no effort toward maintaining this better order of things. "After all, why not?" murmured the good woman. "People run to see far less pretty and less interesting places. The Bishop's House alone is a picture; and as for the Grange, well—" But after mentioning the Grange the relict of the worthy Jabez stopped, as people generally did. She bustled about preparing the tea, and a highly creditable meal was presented, what with home-made bread, fresh butter, new milk, eggs from the poultry-yard at the rear, ham of her own curing, and cakes of her own baking, together with tea and coffee of the best; and when the becomingly attired waitress went up stairs to the second traveller, and informed her of tea being ready, it was a great disappointment to Mrs. Payne to be requested to send a cup of tea up stairs. However, the dressy lady made up for it, and satisfied Mrs. Payne to the utmost by the justice done to her viands.

The presence of this elaborately costumed lady would have caused commotion in the village had she appeared, but it suited her tactics to remain perfectly private until some time after dusk had fallen, then to set forth in company with her unhappy travelling companion, to whom it was the torture of being led to execution. And up to the last moment Mrs. Travers was indignantly opposed to believing the woman's account, although staggered by the persistent, deep-seated purpose at the bottom of it.

The shadowy old Grange, standing back among its trees, and the black water with that hideous boat, chilled the lady with a premonitory sense of the horrible. Mrs. Rolf lost no time indulging in such feelings, or noticing those of her companion, her main object being to preserve the finery which was so important an element of herself. She endeavored to secure this by gathering up the extensively frilled silk, stepping boldly into the boat, and sitting upon her under-skirts. The lady was left to seat herself as best she could, and very much in the damp.

Mrs. Bartholomew Rolf possessed the muscle of a prize-fighter or a Westmoreland wrestler, and sent off their lumbering craft with the expedition of a coal barge in its best and most sportive mood. When the door to the cellar passage was reached and unlocked with the key in her possession, the blonde impressively begged her companion to keep close and utter no sound, whatever she might see or hear, and to retire with her immediately when satisfied, or feeling her strength unequal to remaining longer. The lady having faintly promised this, they went on. The door admitting to the cellar was unfastened, had been so left by Noel Barnard, and this dark area crossed, the back kitchen was reached, and here Mrs. Rolf experienced the first uneasiness, for she had been instructed by her employer to remain there, should the servants be in the other kitchen, until they quitted it for their domestic duties. The servants were not in the kitchen, being occupied up stairs, and a fire was burning in the grate. The woman led the way past into a passage branching from a spacious hall, and crossed this cautiously, opening a door with stealthy absence of sound. It was covered with a thick curtain, falling from above to the carpet. Suddenly she felt her companion cling to her as though for support. The lady heard her husband's voice.



"IT WAS ALL TOO CLEAR, AND THE LADY FELT AS IF HER VERY LIFE WAS PASSING FROM HER DURING THAT SUPREME AGONY."

It was a large oak-panelled room, with a long half-unfolded screen, similar to those at one time general in country houses, drawn across at a few feet from the door.

The occupants of the room were talking at the far end, and the woman raised the curtain a little, then lightly stepped forward, beckoning her victim to the screen, through the divisions of which they could obtain a view of all that was passing. There were waxen lights and a large and cheerful fire, so that there was no difficulty in seeing. It was all too clear, and the lady felt as if her very life was passing from her during that supreme agony. For *he* was there, with his majestic face, paler, more thoughtful, and aged, but thrilling her as she gazed upon him, and stilling her heart's beating with the suddenness; and yet she had been prepared. But he was different somehow—sad, and more tender, and the voice sounded different. Always musical, it was now a broken cadence of deep feeling, exquisite emotion, and it shook her mightily; and but for the words, and that other sitting by him, her needlework laid down, and tearful—but for that the wife, no longer widow, the wife stirred to a new strong interest in life and the living, must have rushed to his side and fallen upon her knees before him while sobbing forth her joy; but that other stayed this, checked the torrent of overwhelming glad and sad surprise, and arrested her with outraged dread.

"What can I say to you, how act, dear Constance? The treasure of your love is deeply welcome to me, and lightens up the weariness of life with more grateful pleasure than I can describe to you. I am all unworthy of it, and unable beyond the limits I have explained to return it; yet all that is mine to give is yours, and on those conditions I accept this young and beautiful affection, so pure and devoted. Do not fear; I will never divulge this sacred pledge, nor hold it valueless. So long as it is a joy to you this house shall be your home, I, all that you would wish. Ever alone, yet never alone, you may live upon earth a life consecrated to that ideal goodness, dim in every heart of girlhood, yet which few possess the courage to confirm as you have done. Ever lean upon me; I will never fail with my support."

These were the words uttered by the man sitting before that Grange fireside, overheard by the wife whom, even as he spoke, he had first in mind and heart all the time; but they sounded to her a very damning knell of perfidy and woe, and so amazing that, had not her own ears heard, she never could or would have duly credited their meaning. "Ever alone, yet never alone:" the words seemed to ring and symbolize the future of herself. She feebly intimated to the impassive woman who had disclosed this dark chapter that she was willing to depart, and they withdrew as they had entered, silently and unseen.

How she contrived to seat herself in the boat or walk the silent village street she never knew; for she was as one dreaming, and but for being led, would have stood or sunk, wondering and powerless.

This thing was all so strange, common troubles and griefs fled from its side as having no kin. She had borne her widowhood, sharp and poignant though it had been, and yet having no friend nor comforter to soothe by so much as a word, save her thoughtful child. And that false friend had come to gloat upon the misery causeless. How glad she felt now that she had refused the false support this Constance Evelyn had offered when she called upon her in her hour of sore trial! Other women had trials, nay, she had heard of other women's husbands neglecting and deserting them; but this was not like such ordinary baseness: it had no precedent, and its marvellous surrounding of daring cast a mystery over it which utterly dumfounded her. Why had he not left the country with this youthful sharer of his guilt, as others did? But no; he was living upon the same sea-board, at a slender journey's distance, open and bare to public scrutiny, his only concealment the change of name. The more these thoughts flashed and crowded upon her, the more enveloped in startling and inscrutable mystery it became. But human nature, bearing much, will not endure beyond a given point, and this delicate lady's strength gave way suddenly in the village street. It was some distance from the inn, and by the garden railing of a pretty cottage, where the blinds were drawn, and within which a piano was being softly played, while a lady's voice sang some sacred melody. Mrs. Rolf, deducing quickly that people who play and sing sacred melodies on a week-day evening are sure to be of Samaritan tendencies, proceeded to the door and knocked, and when a little serving-maid came to the summons, explained that a lady had become faint, would she ask her mistress if she might be brought in until recovered? The music ceased; a pleasant lady dressed in mourning came into the passage, accompanied by a youth, whom, from the resemblance of refined features and gentle manners, it was easy to see was her son; and when they heard the request, they went into the garden and helped to raise and bear the stranger to the house, where she was placed upon a sofa and treated with considerate tenderness.

"I'm glad I didn't have this bother in Brighton or London," was Mrs. Bartholomew's thought, with characteristic want of feeling, champing and fuming impatiently to be off, and fearing she would lose the return train to town. "Are you better, dear?" she murmured in her victim's ear, opining it would be more consistent to use an affectionate term or two. The sufferer neither heard nor understood, was motionless as the dead, but not free from pain, as the poor face proved; and the kind lady of the house, understanding it all too well, leaned over her with deep pity, and told the red-faced, golden-haired person that she must not be removed that night.

"But my goodness me!" cried Mrs. Rolf, in dire alarm, "the woman owes me a lot of money, which I might never see the light of; apart from which it's of no interest to me whether she goes or stops."

Mrs. Evans had looked closely at the two, and feared all was not as it should be.

"Well, you can not press your claim while the lady lies in this state; her recovery is of the first importance, and after that your business, whatever it is."

"That's your opinion, but it isn't mine. I hold people should pay their debts, and take their pleasure afterward with what's left. I've given up the greater part of this blessed day to her, and likely seems my reward. Next time I do a person a service I'll take care to see the money first. But since she's so well off here, and likely to be a worry to me, I'll go on without her. Only let my lady get over this little bit, and if I know her address—and it ain't likely to be out of *our* Directory—I'll be down on her like a door-nail, sharp!" With which eccentric vituperation, Mrs. Rolf flung herself out of the cottage and marched down the street to the inn, at the rear of which she stirred up her man, and was quickly upon the road to Brighton.

"Bertie darling," said Mrs. Evans, much shocked at the violence and selfishness of the person, and much relieved by her departure, "there has been some terrible wrong done here, I am convinced of it. This is a lady of gentle usage, and even now suffering from some recent trial. Every care shall be taken of her. Poor thing! do you notice she wears mourning?" She sat down beside her, the white hands clasped to convey some of the speaker's warmth; the boy standing close, solicitous, and grave.

Presently her eyes opened. "Where is she, that dreadful woman?"

Mrs. Evans looked meaningly at her son, while replying, tenderly—

"You are with friends, and alone." It seemed to stir some painful memory, for the invalid repeated, "Ever alone, yet never alone."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BERTIE EVANS STORMS THE CITADEL.

Hawkingdean heard, and with regret, that the master of the Bishop's House lay ill. With all his peculiarity and gruffness, Geoffrey Hamilton was well-beloved, and the awe which the downsmen and their good-wives felt, blended with this grateful affection, did not spoil the general sorrow when it was known that he lay sick, and had neither doctor nor nurse other than his devoted little daughter. The recluse held both these in sovereign contempt, and if he had desired either, they were not to be obtained nearer than Brighton.

"Just what I feared," said the old pastor, walking thoughtfully home from his daily visit. "I told him he wanted a change of scene, and rest for the mind, and now it may take an unfavorable turn, and prove a really serious illness, instead of the slight indisposition he prefers to consider it. Not but that I would readily accept a far worse one than this for the delight of being nursed by so tender and thoughtful a child." The latching of his garden gate did not shut out the thought of his little sweetheart, whose exquisite ministry of considerate delicacy dwelt with too welcome an intensity to be forgotten when he sat alone in the midst of books, with a portrait over the mantel of the wife who had died and left no child to occupy her place. It was a thin, hard face in the frame. It might have been the painter's fault, but the eyes lacked love and gentleness, and the compressed lips betokened peevishness, or pain, or disappointment, or what not that compresses lips.

And Violet knew that she was thought thus kindly of by her old friend and playmate. Perhaps it cheered some lonely hours in dusky rooms, and by the bedside when, as evening drew on, the dark shading of the chamber sent sometimes a chill to her heart in spite of all its warmth. Those were trying seasons for the sweet girl-child, whose love of light and life and music was an inborn passion; but she never repined, patiently watching by him. She was tearful when he could not see it, because he was so pale and worn-looking. She noticed it more now that he was confined to a sick-chamber.

"And how can the man expect to get better if he won't have in a doctor or consult medical authority?"

Thus the pastor asked of himself. He was in error. Mr. Hamilton had consulted medical authority, had sat up in bed propped by pillows, with the quilt strewn and chairs piled with the most curious old medical works ever collected together. He would medicate for himself, if he needed it, which he very much doubted; but, manlike, he felt a degree alarmed now he was down. So old Pharmacy came down off the shelves—and Geoffrey Hamilton's Pharmacology embraced periods from Paracelsus downward—and up from the chests, of which the Bishop's House boasted many—its cellars and garrets catacombing the dead science and quackery of the world—and out of recesses where lofty cupboards with oak doors concealed vast tiers of ancient tomes bound in the imperishable pig-skin of the good old school of binding, when men's thought was preserved as though, indeed, to last forever. He set himself to go through these, hunting out what was the matter with him, turning faint very often over the task, and decidedly more alarmed than before he commenced; mumbling and grumbling over Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham, searching deep the treatises of Malpighi, and in alarm tossing from him a bulky Boerhaave, then going irritably into the Hunters, from which he emerged shivering, and fancying his complaints multiplied a hundredfold. Mead and Laennec were searchingly examined, and with assumed energy, as though to warn the old physicians against coming any of their barber tricks with him, strong and well, and opposed to nonsense, especially professional nonsense. He had picked them up very cheap long ago, and had never shown them particular reverence. They might resent it, now he was, so to say, at a disadvantage, and he just frowned surlily upon them, as intimating his ability to do without them, and the resistful attitude he was taking, midst which he tumbled on one side, faint, upsetting his pillows, and dropping his books; bringing Miss Hamilton to the bed, fluttering finely and tremulous, and she gave him some brandy, when he sat up again and tried to have a tussle with iron Abernethy, whose ferociousness settled him, and he did no more for that day. He did not gather much after all, except that he was very bad, which he more than suspected before, and he felt proportionately disgusted, not with himself, but with the doctors.

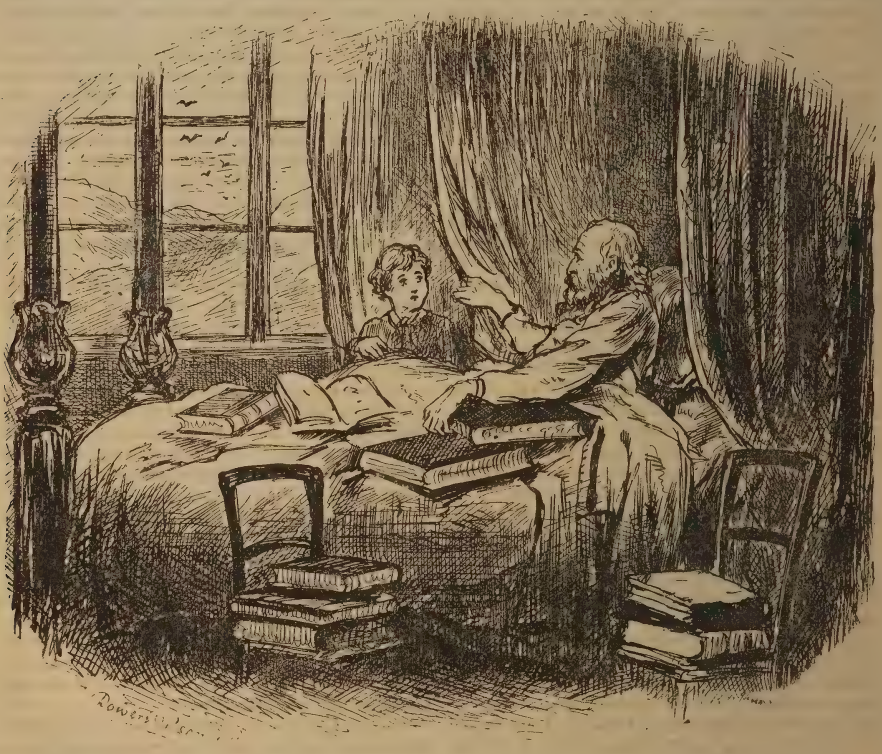
Like many another his patience did not improve with confinement. He was disposed to be moody, irritable, and gloomy, and any one but his untiring little girl would have thought him very trying; perhaps she did at one time, but now he often rewarded her with a fond smile. She knew they were there before, though they did not often show themselves, and this made all the difference. Still, it was dull work for her, and, when he was lost in abstraction, she felt terribly alone. His muttering, when in company with the ancients, did not improve it, for what did she know of Celsus, of Aëtius, or of Paulus Ægineta? Her little world was all her little day circumscribed by the verdant hollow between the hills; the small village was content not to trouble with what lay beyond.

Calling at the cottage one afternoon, the pastor told Mrs. Evans of his friend's illness, and incidentally alluded to Violet's attentive care. Illness, which breaks down so many barriers, broke down that of Mrs. Evans's reserve, and she said she would venture to call and see if she could be of any use, and offer to bear the child company. Both Bertie and the pastor were surprised; but the boy, who knew how self-denying she was, and how often she had tended others at the cost of rest and health, made no remark, but simply looked with the admiring love ever animating his countenance when his mother was the subject of contemplation. The pastor, however, gently remarked, "I am afraid our friend would raise some objection; he is very singular, you know, in some things."

"I shall not disturb him," said the widow, quietly. "The little girl needs a motherly friend to converse with just now. I hope not to intrude so far as to cause annoyance."

The lady called, to Violet's joy. It cheered the child—she felt a different being. There was no companionship in their servants, and she literally had no friend to whom to confide her troubles or anxieties; so these became knit, and their affection one for another grew with rare delicacy and sensitiveness.

Violet told her papa of it, and his brow clouded at first; but afterward, finding the lady had no desire to trespass, and was diffident, actuated alone by the most respectful sympathy, he turned all the other way, wished to see her, and did so, thanking her for the kind attention, and, when they were alone, talked with anxious solicitude of the future of his little girl, should any thing befall himself. "Of course it won't, I know very well," he said; "but when one becomes imbued with the horrible theories of the doctors, one never knows what to expect, and I've been reading some of their articles lately as a congenial pursuit." His grim smile, illustrating the cynicism, was any thing but pleasant. This sensible woman, however, could detect that the surface of ice covered a depth of abundant riches. She did not utter an eloquent dirge before he was dead, nor musically toll a knell for his departure, but cheerfully taking his thin bony hand, held it with that inspiring warmth which puts life into one, while she said, "You will be restored to health shortly, and need not be borne down by any anxiety of the kind. I will always be the friend of your daughter, if you permit it. I am humbly circumstanced, as you know, but sincere, and, in my opinion, sincerity compensates for many qualities one may not possess. I have not found many people either genuine or sincere in my short contact with the world." This remark pleased the scholar; he set a seal on it therewith, which bore this impression—"Hollow."



"'GOOD-MORNING, DEAR SIR; I AM SORRY TO SEE YOU SO ILL!'"

Life at the Bishop's House became brighter and happier after the first visits of their neighbor. Violet improved visibly under the impetus of the friendship; it also communicated additional softness to her naturally pleasing manner, as the companionship of a refined gentlewoman will, and the master felt this innovation to be of service.

Once he alluded to the lady's son, when she instantly replied, "He is very well; engaged as usual with his books, and giving all his time to study. When he goes out he wanders down to the shore. Like his poor father, he loves the sea passionately."

Then he turned all the other way; wonderfully inconsistent ones these recluse scholars, the law of probabilities hath no bearing with them. "Let him come and sit with me an hour; we will talk together about the future which he is entering. Commencing a course of erudition is like setting out upon a long journey, and advice beforehand sometimes saves roundabout progress, taking up time without valuable result; not that I would interfere with the programme of his studies." She felt proud he had tendered the request, and was grateful.

"I propose to take Violet for a nice long walk upon the Downs to-morrow morning, and my son shall sit with you while we are absent. It will do your girl good; she has not been out enough of late." This remark appeared graciously thoughtful to him, and so the arrangement was decided.

Next day, soon after calling, the widow took Violet off with her for a splendid run upon the heights, and many were the injunctions as to the care to be taken of his darling. He soon felt dull with her away from him, and became fretful under the burden of being unable to accompany her himself. His thin white arm went astray upon the coverlet, a thin white hand clutching the old-fashioned many-colored curtain at the head of his bed; wistfully looking between the dark bed posts at the window-framed view of the Downs, his pillowed head was raised slightly, so that he could lie and gaze upon them. With all his nerves keenly alert, dreading the knock at the door which would announce his visitor, whom he now regretted having invited, and quivering intensely upon the soft knock being heard, followed by the entrance of the boy, who looked in his face with an appearance of sensitive deference, and a solicitous tenderness that was like a light from within.

"Good-morning, dear Sir; I am sorry to see you so ill!"

"Wrong boy, wrong; there's nothing the matter. You thought I was going off like your poor father, I suppose? That's the worst of it; if one does take a little rest in the form most convenient and agreeable, people run away with the idea one is seriously ill—going to die, in fact."

"On the contrary, my mother told me she thought you would be about again in a few days; you were very weak, but she hoped you would soon get out."

The invalid raised himself by an effort upon his elbow, and half fiercely asked, "Whatever business has your mother or any body else's mother to authoritatively declare I am suffering from very weakness? I'll show you, if the fit seizes me, that I can get up and mount yon hill. Things are coming to a pretty pass if a man can't recline on his own bed without all this fuss being made of it! What have you come here for?"

"To sit with you; a pleasure that will, I know, be all upon my side: yet, I confess, it is a pleasure I have longed for." Geoffrey Hamilton looked up to see if the exasperating smile bore the pretty speech company. No; it was a thoughtful face, not smiling.

"Queer lad; are there no boatmen to engage your fancy, implements at the farms or on the land, no young men of the villas with butterfly nets? Your friend the parson—what is the old man doing that you should come to me?"

"And why should I not come to you, if you are good enough to have me? If I worry you, I will go when you bid me; but if I may stay, I will make little noise and try not to displease."

"But you do worry. I can feel your knee against the bed now; it goes all through me; and I don't like any body standing staring and appearing to wish to do something enthusiastic. Some people are like galvanic batteries, and you are one of them."

"I will sit down, Sir, if you please."

"Yes, but be careful; the chairs are old and creaky. If you pull that one forward, bear lightly upon it; the casters are rusty or something, and make a horrid, disagreeable sound. Your mother must needs move it yesterday; nearly killed me—not but what I'm strong enough—don't mistake me."

The boy removed a small parcel from his pocket and commenced to untie it; the rustling of the crisp white paper in which it had been infolded with such nicety disturbed the susceptible invalid. Quivering in every limb he angrily desired his visitor to discontinue. "There's nothing, I do think, comes up to the horrible rustle of a sheet of paper, unless it is a silk dress; put it down, please." By this time, however, Master Evans had taken a small bottle from it, and looking down, he said, softly—

"When poor papa was overworked and low he used to take this and derive much benefit. As we had some of it left I dared to bring it with me, thinking, perhaps, you could describe the ingredients of which it is composed; I take such an interest in chemistry." This was rounding a point, and a dangerous one; his real object was to try and persuade their friend to try the mixture, which, composed of phosphates, iron, and other recuperative qualities, had proved of service to the overtaxed preacher upon several occasions. For some moments the invalid remained without speaking; then he said wearily, as though the final blow had deprived him of his remaining strength, "Throw it out of the window, or else take it and yourself off together."

"If you wish it, Sir; but perhaps you will tell me first. I am sure you are familiar with the science." Spoken gently, but with calm self-possession, and not showing symptoms of being hurt by the uncouth treatment he had received. The master of the Bishop's House raised himself upon his elbow.

"Don't you know I have been a student of science all my life? Is my midnight lamp under such a bushel you can not see from your part of the village that while the dullards sleep a man is here spending life in investigation, and then you ask me to be analytical over some quack's bottle of trumpery wash! What on earth are you thinking of? Insulting me it appears when I am unable to resent it." Then the turn, to which now that he was weak he seemed subject, stole upon him, and irresolutely, yet with decreased violence, he said, "Give it me!" Taking it from the boy, whose cheerfulness and refusal to be affronted would have favorably impressed a more rocky being than this old man, he smelt and tasted it, and then affirmed he knew nothing about it, but added, half surlily, that he might leave it on the mantel-piece.

"Shall I read to you a little while?" looking lovingly toward the old books scattered about—a look the master caught corner-ways, and appropriated as a piece of feeling in spite of himself. How it sunk into the heart with a new strange warmth!

"*Can* you read? I hate gabbling, while an affectation of oratory is detestable."

"Let me try. If you do not like it, I will leave off."

Mr. Hamilton directed him to the formidable volumes, and bade him select a work of Cornelius Agrippa from the pile. It was *The Vanity and Nothingness of Human Knowledge* by that old writer, and Master Bertie Evans handled its worm-eaten covers gingerly. Some grass from the Downs, yellow as the pages, served for a book-marker, and he commenced at that place. After some minutes Mr. Hamilton cried—

"Put it down, please! I don't say you read badly, but I suppose it's because I'm not used to it. Without being an unpleasant voice, yours has not attained the mellowness essential to the comfort of a sick person—or rather" (hastily correcting himself) "I meant to have said a person whose nerves are not so strong as they ought to be, considering the out-door exercise I've had. And it may be my fancy, but there's a little affected way about you I don't quite like. I wonder whether that tenderness and thought are genuine or put on?" (musingly, half to himself.)

"I never told a lie in my life!" said Bertie, with a hot cheek.

"Nobody said you did."

"But you are questioning my acting one."

"If you put yourself into a questionable position, don't be offended if awkward inquiries are made."

Master Evans recovered his good humor immediately, and said, "I beg your pardon for speaking out, Sir. I should have known better."

"You should know better than to apologize when you are not in the wrong."

The boy looked up with a brilliant face; the kindly remark gave promise of consideration, after all, at the hands of this cross-grained, sensitive student. How he longed for some sign of his relenting! It had been a thankless office thus far; perhaps he could say something that would more happily impress the sick gentleman. With some apprehension he remarked—

"I wish I might accompany you on some of those longer walks which Miss Violet can not take with you, Sir." He endeavored to speak without any extraordinary eagerness, but at the same time as though the arrangement would be a pleasure to him. Mr. Hamilton raised himself in the bed, and rested his arm on the pillow, while he half irritably asked—

"Will you please to tell me what there can be in the companionship of a person like myself to make such an infliction agreeable?"

"Learning, which it would take many such walks to fathom; and wisdom, which neither tutors nor schools seem to impart." And the answer pleased the master mightily, but he said, "I wonder where you picked that pedantic phrase up?" The boy did not reply; he was not going to be again betrayed into a warm retort to be afterward regretted. Then Mr. Hamilton made concession. "I don't want to repulse you if you think there is the chance of your acquiring any knowledge of use to you now or at a later period of your life. When I am strong enough to take these longer walks, I shall be glad of your company." Bertie felt that he was making progress, and was well content, and not wishing to trespass too far, thought he would gently rise for departure. The conciliation of anchorites is always a troublesome piece of business, and so Master Evans had found it; but he was altogether unprepared for Mr. Hamilton's peremptory request that he would keep seated. "You have but just come, and now you want to be off, it's not worth disturbing me for." Thereupon the visitor seated himself with an air of immeasurable delight, which the sick man noted with secret gratification. And shortly after that they found themselves talking as though never a contrary word had been interchanged between them, and time passed quicker than ever before in Geoffrey Hamilton's experience. It was genuine pleasure to impart his store of wisdom, especially to so rapt and attentive a disciple. The enthusiasm of the boy was contagious, and put new life and vigor into the nerveless recluse; and when at length Bertie went home, both he and his new friend were mutually pleased with one another. Not the least of the boy's pleasant recollections was that the master had expressed a hope that he might see him again that week. And the next time Bertie called he was received with friendliness and courtesy. When a nature like Geoffrey Hamilton's is courted from its armor, when its bristling points of antagonism are changed for tendrils of an equal sensitiveness that will cling with as resolute tenacity, then all the wealth that is in such a nature is for the first time seen and understood. These two became great friends, and, after Mr. Hamilton got about again, constant companions. With more familiar knowledge of the boy, that uneasy sense of possible hazard attending similar friendship between Bertie and Violet passed off, and the recluse did not deny himself the pleasure of his young daughter's company also upon the occasions of those pleasant walks with Bertie.

So the delicious time of dreams came to Violet, the happiest time she had known. Her father was kinder and more human, and she felt she owed it chiefly to their thoughtful friends at the cottage, but did not forget the old pastor—her silvern playmate—who had long been hoping for this change.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LONDON AND OLYMPIAN HORS-D'ŒUVRE.

Confusion was rife in the board-room above the London and Olympian. There the directors had met to consider a more than usually serious situation; indeed, since the memorable Percival meeting there had not been so expressive a demonstration of opinion. The gentlemen of the bank were assembled to inquire into enormous deficits, discovered by accident, and disbelieved by the more unsuspecting members, until ocular proof was placed before them of the heavy losses sustained by the bank. Then, in the face of the astonishing frauds discovered, this gathering was hastily summoned, and the usually placid and satisfied gentlemen were roused to an excitement at once (as the senior partner painfully remarked) indecorous and unprecedented. It is not pleasant for a committee of staid and elderly gentlemen to discover that they have been befooled by some one in whom they have placed confidence, and depended upon for that conscientious service not always expected of the less confidential. Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., was profoundly put out, and some idea of this important gentleman's grievance may be drawn from his own remark to the gentleman next him, that if he had suspected that such a thing were possible in the London and Olympian he would have resigned and realized his shares in favor of the Bank of England.

In the heat of the animated discussion, the white-haired senior partner rose, and half nervously indicated his wish for silence. "I think," he interposed, mildly, "we shall better advance the matter by a more systematic consideration of the points at issue; and not to lose the suggestions and opinions of our friends, perhaps it will be a safer plan if one speaks at a time." This bland hint stemmed the torrent of indignant eloquence, and the members addressed the meeting one at a time. Not for graver weight, but by reason of superior impudence, Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., undertook to speak first, and it was in this wise: "Gentlemen: When, many years ago, I consented to become a director of this once respectable bank, I was most positively assured by our friend in the chair, then as now representing the head of this firm, that there had not been and could not be any unpleasantness embarrassing to a capitalist or painful to a gentleman. I will not say our friend might have foreseen the possibility of some such affair as is now unhappily occupying our attention, but I must gently remark that he ought to have strenuously opposed the appointment of the scoundrel Miles to the responsible position he has lately filled, and which you will all remember I resisted to the utmost of my power." The speaker paused and looked daringly round from face to face as defying any member present to challenge the unblushing assertion. The gentlemen of the bank entertained a hazy sort of idea that Mr. Gripper's resistance had not been so determined as represented, but not feeling quite sure upon the point, they contented themselves with twisting the tag end of the recollection silently in their mind, neither confirming nor denying the statement. A course that did not, however, suit the senior partner, who, with a little fluster and a rising color, exclaimed, "I beg your pardon; I—er—you—er—there is some mistake, Mr. Gripper. I did not nominate Stephen Miles; I was extremely reluctant to move in the matter, and was guided entirely by the wishes of the meeting!" The senior partner wore a faultless frill upon his shirt front, and diamond studs, and above the violence of his sorrow at the mistake which had occurred, this specimen of the unrivalled skill of his laundress rose and fell with a significance that should have moved the phlegmatic Gripper; but no, he turned as with surprise at the negative remark of his senior. "There can be no mistake, Sir; I dare say I can even recall your words upon the occasion: I think they were, 'I have carefully observed Mr. Miles, and he appears very diligent in fulfilling his duties. I am not prepared to signify any gentleman whom I would appoint in preference.' Possibly our friends will remember the remark?" Yes, they remembered it, or something like it, which was near enough, and bowed assentingly. It caused the senior partner to feel as nearly angry as this placable old gentleman ever did feel, but he acted as they used to act when swords were worn at the side—bowed with courtesy which pardons while it does not yield. Then the partner second in order by years and position, a stout rubicund person, warm of hue and temper, and possessed of pertinacious fondness for arguing and debating, sifting evidence, as he called it, and who would cling to the last thread of a discussion with persistent obstinacy until but a thread was left to hold on by, next addressed the meeting, without preface or appeal.

"What I want to know is, why this fellow who has decamped was not checked back regularly, and so pulled up before? It's a dead certainty there's blame somewhere, but who the devil to single out for censure is at first sight difficult of solution. When, however, we come to go into the pros and cons, and investigate the surroundings, it appears to me our friend Mr. Gripper knew about as much of this young man as any body."

"Sir," began Mr. Gripper, becoming very hot.

"Don't interrupt me, please," added the stout and rubicund director, with spirit. "We agreed to speak one at a time, I believe, and if I remember aright, you've spoken, and if you've not, perhaps you'll wait while I speak; and what I particularly want to know is, why no inquiry was instituted at an earlier stage of the proceedings? why, in fact, this young man has been allowed to go on pretty well as he liked, perpetrating a succession of misdemeanors, and fraudulently appropriating to this terrific extent? There must be some gross mismanagement somewhere, you know, and what I want to know is, where? It is far from my wish to bring a charge of culpable neglect upon this body, or any individual member thereof, but it bears it upon the face of it, and sophistry never yet averted the just course of an inquiry. Proved, then, that blame exists, it has to be apportioned or directed to a given point; the question at issue resolves itself into a plain statement, and what I want to know is, why it was not resolved before? Hastening to the opposite angle of the argument, I may observe that any man possessed of the consummate villainy which appears to have been this Miles's noticeable trait and supreme chief quality, any man, I say, finding he was unsuspected, nay, almost encouraged, in his temerity, would prosecute to a further, nay, the furthest, extreme the wrong-doing by which we are so greatly the sufferers; and what I want to know is, why wasn't he suspected, and whose obtuseness is responsible for it?"

The third director considered that his friend had concluded his remarks, or ought to have done so, and without rudely interrupting him—for he was an eminently polite and affable person—contrived to introduce his opening remark at a pause between the other's loquacious sentences. The remark was this: "We have been hoodwinked!" Whereat the cross-eyed gentleman at the extreme left touched the gentleman next him, and said in a low voice that it was undoubtedly true the whole thing had been seen in a wrong light from the beginning. The third director, who was of aristocratic appearance and leanings, and by polish was the direct opposite of his friend who had last spoken, then went on to make a short address, with the graceful prepossession of a Chesterfield. "There is a certain indignity, gentlemen, attending the duty we are performing; it is humiliating to our self-respect; the fineness of our principles is outraged. As loyal subjects of her Majesty, we advance the interests of this great land in the Funds upon a system of honor and integrity which we each feel pledged to preserve; and the least approach to the injury of this basis of right dealing affects our inmost sensibility, whereby, you will admit, all true honesty stands. When at my house at Surbiton I received the brief note of our friend the chairman, intimating that something was wrong, and requesting my presence at this meeting, I assure you, gentlemen, it was one of the most anxious moments of my life. Until our interview in the parlor before your arrival I had not the least suspicion of the nature of the trouble—imagined it to be something connected with the foreign loans; but when our friend communicated to me that our confidential manager had betrayed our confidence, it was a deeper blow than could ever arise from the mere fluctuations of business. I at once said, 'I never liked that young man, and always entertained an uncomfortable feeling in his company.' In short, the vague presentiment of this, to which I could not then have given definition, was ever present. Gentlemen, I always experienced grave doubts concerning the guilt of the previous manager, Percival, whom you dismissed in so rude a manner; and I fear, gentlemen, a serious error was then committed."

This conservative and gentlemanly director then sat down; he evidently had not been speaking from notes, so the trifling inaccuracy regarding his share in the dismissal of Mr. Percival passed. A fourth quietly stood upon his feet, plunged his fat hands forth as though about to dive, drew down his pair of snowy cuffs, fidgeted his scarf pin—it was a silver dog-head, and the ears kept catching in his beard at every sudden movement, which twinges caused him to feel cross. He darted with a barb-like expedition after the subject occupying attention, and brought it up wounded, flayed it, and upon the board-table dissected it with maleficent expedition. "The London and Olympian has been pillaged, through the medium of forgery, to an extent that has shaken it to its foundation, by the instrumentality of the person filling the most important position connected with its management. That person has absconded; the round sum total of his embezzlement, so far as can be calculated by falsified entries found, and absence of entries altogether, will not be covered by a sum less than £10,000! With the fruits of this peculation to aid his escape, and with the start of three clear days (it is known to you he plausibly asked for leave of absence to visit his sick mother), it will not surprise me if Scotland Yard fails in tracking him; and meantime it behooves us to consider what is to be done. That the bank will suffer in credit as well as in substance is certain; we had proof enough of that this morning, when, shortly after the rumor had spread, three of our oldest depositors gave notice of the removal of their balance. For a double calamity of this unfortunate kind to befall us within a term of two years is disaster enough to shake the most solid concern. I don't want to breathe suspicion of a panic, but in my opinion a sudden, instant, and skillful *coup* is necessary to re-instate our prestige and, possibly, to sustain our credit. It is one of those emergencies not to be fathomed, but which time, like the proverbial sneak it is, converts to one's hurt and to the discomfiture of share-holders." Pushing back his cuffs, which the motion and emotion had lowered below mark, and smoothing the broad outlying folds of his coat, this gentleman resumed his seat. There was a pause. Then—

A fifth spoke without rising. He was the prime minister of this financial body, and dotted on his thumb-nail with a gold pencil-case while speaking. "Does our friend wish to signify by use of the expression 'a coup' acquisition of increased capital, the promoting of a private loan, the realizing by local stock, the selling out, or the contraction of floating capital? Perhaps our friend will specify."

"I had no particular method in mind, Mr. Goldworthy; it simply occurred to me as the politic course, if taken in time, and calculated to re-adjust our position."

"Of course, very proper, and the method to be adopted," returned number five, looking toward the chairman.

"If you will permit me?" The senior partner rose to speak, and all became keenly interested in what the white-haired, pleasant-mannered gentleman said. "I do not put my suggestion arbitrarily; I will merely propose it, and leave it with the committee to accept or decline as they may think best. We have discovered that the charge unhappily made against Mr. Percival was unfounded. A communication to that effect should be made to him without delay, together, I think, with re-assurance of our esteem and confidence. My proposal is—in justice to him, and in the interests of ourselves—to cordially invite his resumption of office here upon the same footing as before."

"Won't do," muttered Rehoboam Gripper, Esq. "Now he's had the idea put in his head he'll avail himself of it, if only out of revenge. He's got it in him if he didn't do it, and we're sufficiently in a mess without any of Mr. George Percival's superfine help."

A sixth partner begged to take a different view to that of Mr. Gripper, and to concur with the proposal suggested by their respected friend in the chair. Mr. Percival had been greatly liked by their customers. His return to office would certainly counteract one of the unpleasantnesses, and he was warmly in favor of it.

A seventh had pleasure in thinking the same, and he was of opinion Mr. Percival had from the very first studied their best interests, and worked with indefatigable industry at all connected with his duties.

"His literary duties," said Gripper, Esq., snappishly. "We don't want a man here whose time is given to scribbling behind our backs, and who would creep into the position of gentlemen of regular occupation, when his proclivities are all in the direction of a Bohemianish mode of living."

"I think you take a harsh estimate of Mr. Percival's principles, Mr. Gripper," said the senior member, with friendly remonstrance. "I am convinced that during the long period of his engagement here he devoted every minute of his time to the conscientious performance of his by no means easy duties."

An eighth speaker thought the question opened another of equal importance, to which it was united—if they did not re-elect Mr. Percival, it was imperative some other gentleman should be appointed.

The discussion as to the advisability of re-instating Mr. Percival in his old position of manager was sustained with spirit, and it was ultimately decided to dispatch the bank messenger to his house, and request the favor of his immediate attendance if he happened to be at home.

Transit from one part of London to another is a matter of such magical celerity that they expected him within half an hour, and meantime discussed the awkward nature of the proceedings so far as Stephen Miles was concerned, and it might have done that amphibious being much good to have heard their criticism at its most candid height.

The ninth speaker, a tremendously solemn personage, celebrated for his closeness, and a melancholy verging upon the hypochondriacal, opened his firmly placed lips, groaned inwardly, and with a dull, pathetic intensity said, "The saddest part of this very sad trouble appears in the hypocritical arts practiced by this irretrievably bad man, and when we contemplate the example thus held up to the juniors, we may well experience the profoundest grief. We should exercise the completest supervision to observe if evil effects are germinating; for, my brethren—er—hum—dear friends, it but too often follows that contamination corrupts successive grades, when an elder yieldeth unto the devices of the Evil One." They were not sure they had caught what he meant, but they preserved the outward and visible signs of respect. One middle-aged gentleman opposite, with a pair of violet-colored glasses bridging an impressionable nose, stared hard, yet with awe, at the speaker, regarding him as a teacher. It was indeed known that he sometimes addressed religious associations upon vital subjects, and as from time immemorial the religiously inclined banker has been a more than usually venerated professor, this gentleman who preserved the prestige of the London and Olympian in a pious sense was looked up to and estimated at a high standard, which, however, wouldn't continue very much longer if things went on as they had been doing.

Since this friend had shunted the question into a new groove, and encroached on the moralities, the tenth speaker sought to improve the occasion, being under an impression that good effect would follow a quiet word or two with the clerks; having them in after closing of the bank, and with friendly, impressive earnestness, talking with them, and dwelling particularly upon the reward of the honest and high-principled here and hereafter, depicting in warning periods the punishments befalling the wretched backsliders from financial rectitude, and the betrayers of human faith in consols.

The gentleman remarkable for closeness, whose daughter it was traditionally reported had been wedded in a gown of green leno trimmed with water-cresses, did not commend the proposition. He feared, he said, it would be misconstrued, would exert a contrary effect to that desired. It was not, he thought, a fitting occasion for official exposition; nor did circumstances, he believed, justify the course.

The previous speaker, who was troubled with habitual indigestion, took a bite at a ginger-tablet carried in his waistcoat pocket, and the eleventh speaker calmly and with after-dinner flexibility favored with a word or two. In his opinion, formed after a life's observation, the ground-work of all their own and all similar evil was attributable to three flagrant and notoriously mistaken institutions; first, the heads of departments in banking establishments were paid too liberally; it awoke desire for more, whereas a contracted salary presented ever-recurring quarterly meditation upon contentment with little; secondly, the hours of business were not long enough; where a man got home by five or six o'clock it afforded an entire evening for the evolving of mischief, and he thought it a great mistake. "Run the hours of business on to seven or eight o'clock, so as to break their evening, and only to permit of a saunter home and quiet read before bed-time. I am satisfied this would operate with salutary results, and that both the young men and ourselves would benefit; next, I entirely disapprove of holidays, which, I am sorry to say, appear upon the increase, and which are fraught with terrible temptation and ill effects. I can understand the hard-worked manufacturers, sons of toil, and shop-people even, occasionally needing a change; but what is there in so essentially light and non-laborious an occupation as that with which we are more immediately connected to warrant the easy-going treatment and observance it is the custom to extend?"

They were in the midst of this discussion, when ex-Manager Percival knocked and entered, with the old business-like manner that sent a thrill through the length of the board, and the forgiving affable courtesy we should expect from the man was also apparent.

"Good-day, Mr. Percival; we are glad to see you, and are obliged for this prompt attention." Thus the director at the corner nearest his entrance, while one and another nodded pleasantly and with the utmost friendliness. George Percival felt surprised, but supposed they had discovered their error, and in his heart thanked God if it were so, for the horrible charge had oppressed him like a nightmare, although he said little about it. He walked to the head of the table, and with a respectful word or two asked their pleasure.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Percival, for your personal response to our message. Sit down, Sir; we wish for a word with you."

He did so, with perfect self-possession, guessing what was coming, wishing it was over. The senior partner continued—

"It is our happy duty to acquaint you with the fact of your being entirely cleared in our judgment of the charges some time ago made against you; and for which we desire to offer ample apology, with more sincere regret on my part, and I am sure I may say on the part of my friends present, than can well be expressed. It is our wish to indemnify you in some way, and we shall therefore pay to you or to your account in the bank your accustomed salary for the entire time you have been away, and which you will oblige us much by simply regarding in the light of a vacation. We shall also have much pleasure in re-appointing you manager of the London and Olympian, if convenient and agreeable to you to resume work here."

Although moved exceedingly and a prey to varying emotions, Mr. Percival contrived to maintain an outward calmness, but with polite firmness to acknowledge and decline the proffered trust.

"I thank you, Sir, and gentlemen, for the good-will and confidence you entertain toward me. I am always grateful for esteem, and to be cleared honorably of an unjust accusation is what I have never ceased to hope for; but I have not supposed for a moment I should be invited to resume office here. I may as well say that my present engagements would not permit of it even if I felt comfortable in so doing, which, candidly, I should not. All the same, I thank you, and truly hope you may be successful in your efforts to obtain a conscientious, high-principled manager."

"We will try to do better than we have done, anyway," muttered Rehoboam Gripper, Esq. "We shall have to go a long way to do worse." He was looking straight at the clear broad brow of the author. With a little cough of annoyance the senior partner explained—

"Mr. Gripper is alluding to Stephen Miles, Mr. Percival, who has systematically falsified our books." George had asked no questions; this threw light on an old mystery. He was surprised, and also experienced sorrow. It did not controvert the venom underlying Mr. Gripper's remark; and, not as bearing malice, but to settle all up now they were upon the distasteful inquiry, he thought well to say—

"No, Sir; Mr. Gripper's remark was directed at myself. For some time he subjected me to a series of petty annoyances, and chiefly brought about my disgrace; to effect which he descended to private meetings with Miles, and stealthy visits to the bank. Had my engagements permitted my accepting your offer, I would not have returned here until Rehoboam Gripper's name was erased from the list of the London and Olympian directors."

Mr. Gripper was about to reply angrily, when the senior partner requested there might be no disputation in the board-room. And—

"You are quite sure we can not induce you to reconsider your decision, Mr. Percival?"

"Quite, Sir; but I thank you for this proof of restored confidence, which is valued by me exceedingly."

Shortly afterward Mr. Percival retired with the pleasurable conviction that his innocence and integrity were again fully established; a satisfaction attended with encouraging feelings that would prove helpful to him.

Gabrielle's gratitude when told of it was, if possible, deeper than his own. She did not say much, but was tremulous with emotion, and leaving the room she went to her chamber, and upon her knees by the bedside she lifted up her heart, and could there express all upon which her tongue had been tied when with him. Wondrous was the fervor of her thankfulness; sorrowful in his sorrow, she rejoiced when he knew joy.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE CONFIDENCE OF GABRIELLE.

Gabrielle felt strangely alone when George had left them; the evenings were long and wearisome; all day there was nothing to look forward to; the house seemed despoiled, the rooms to have been robbed of their homeliness and comfort. There was a great bare blank; it was what men and women call "loss." There was a grim, unkind solitude; it was what the suffering call "despair." So gentle, so uncomplaining, so persistently attentive to work and duty, they who loved her never guessed it, the old people going down the vale, to whom this unmarried daughter represented so much; who was so dear they never thought there might be yearning upon her side for a change. If so, it did not make itself conspicuous. Gabrielle was eminently one of those who conceal and shelter their finer emotion.

Yet she trembled when, the next day, her mother said, "Better give George's room a good clear out." George's room no longer! A good clear out! Why, her face was averted whenever she passed the door going to and from her chamber. Dear old room! she would have gone over every inch of carpet, kissing it; no more would it be trod by the feet of her girlhood's hero. But her mother was of a practical turn of mind; she tied a pocket-handkerchief round her neat morning cap, called the girl from the kitchen to bring brush and dust-pan, broom and tea-leaves, and proceeded with her "good clear out." And it caused her daughter a sharp pang to see the well-loved easy-chair briskly wheeled on to the landing, the little table where he used to sit writing to so late an hour, which was sacred to her as an altar, carelessly crowded with trifles, every one of which had an eloquence of its own; the book-shelves on their cord were taken down and set compact upon the floor, while the books that he had used were bundled without ceremony into the upper division of a cupboard. They were all known to her, old friends, conned over in his absence to see new markings, each page pressed to the lips he never kissed, nor ever wished to. It is a fatal relationship, this of cousinhood! There was the ink-stand with old pens, all used by him—and she reverently picked them out of the dust where she found them thrown, while none of earth saw the care, and consigned them to safer keeping in her pocket. The footstool tumbled into the passage for use in their common sitting-room she would remove to her own chamber, and thereon would kneel at prayer-time. Here was the brown sheep-skin rug from before the fire-place, and she quivered with pain as she recalled his once saying, "Only fancy, Gabrielle, a little fairy-like girl curled fast asleep on my rug!" It was a sad ordeal for Gabrielle, that turning out of his room. How she worked! Her mother thought, much gratified, "Gabrielle is wonderfully well and active! What a blessing is health!" and began to feel poorly immediately, leaving the rest of the work to the wonderfully well and active, who, when it was done, changed labor, and in the kitchen prepared some delicacy for her invalid.

She kept all her feeling under; but like the pictured passion on some old shield hanging upon a wall, while dim light makes indistinct the love lines, and weaves a pale central haze of gray, it was there hard graven, and terribly vivid at times when the fierce light of sudden pain, as on that morning, beamed full upon it. Vividly and often came to her mind the poem of a graceful lyrist—

"Life, indeed, is not
The thing we plann'd it out ere hope was dead.
And then we women can not choose our lot.

"Much must be borne which it is hard to bear;
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
The deed that never hath been done, the tear
That never hath been wept—who knows how deep
These lurk in unlived lives? Ourselves behind
Ourselves we leave, and miss what most we seek;
In our own memories our graves we find,
And when we lean upon our hearts, they break.

"The thing which must be must be for the best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in Heaven humbly for the rest."

This was her creed, and in the quiet service of the home, as well as in the daily ministry among the poor, she lived in consonance with that inner, loftier, more spiritual principle, the guiding influence of her life. And the days were quietly uneventful now, still as dreamy summer Sabbath afternoons—just that Christian idealism, just that dutiful affection in the home—and that was all. Are these quiet crossed lives, thwarted of their hope, happy? Very often; for they possess peace which represents much on earth. And has Gabrielle's story ended here? Not at all; there is more to come—a struggle, a victory, and a more perfect experience of the principle than is this still Sabbath afternoon life.

Such grief as hers may slumber, but never dies; and when once neglected for another, it only moans for the last poor justice. It is only when alone the most comely mask of all we wear, *resignation*, may fall, and a return be made to dreams that seem so far away, so full of music. The great mystery of suffering in its gloomy sublimity was in her case without its great compensation, Love, the all-powerful healer. The suffering was there—stark, bleak, bitter—but there was no love that she knew of. Many thus wounded find the solution of sorrow in work, the impassioned enthusiasm goes into it, and that work becomes a safety-vent. One powerful cause of woman's electric perfection in authorship is that faculty of compressing all her soul into her subject. The pulse of her firm right hand converts the pen into an instrument of electricity; it becomes a conductor; the cool precision and methodical arrangement of the masculine writer would chill the splendid impetuosity which has given the world some of its best. The fire that burned in the heart of that Lady of Lesbos, whom the ancients termed the tenth Muse, is not dead, so far as its inspiration goes. "Poetry," wrote Mrs. Browning, "has been as serious a thing to me as life itself, and life has been a very serious thing. I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry, nor leisure for the hour of the poet." Gabrielle's nature was so delicately sensitive that even poetry itself, the aliment of her soul, conspired to crush it. This exquisite morbidness, rather the morbidness of angels than of women, through poetry found the outlet for the spirit's pain. When the soul that sings such silent songs is understood in its beautiful, unearthly, unsustained perfection, we may see the millennium of idealism. But there was no half-mournful, half-pleading regret. She had accepted her destiny, and rather possessed an aroused and arousing faith, that will not despond, will not be lowered from its calm pre-eminence.

There is a word that means so much, yet tells so little, that sways with significance of trouble, and breathes soft and sweet of an unforgotten past—Divided. Yet what sweetness may pervade garish and bitter circumstance, even as the inspiration of some rare odor floats through those old poem tales of Arabia, wherein the cool, pure blue song lies back upon a throbbing sky heavy and hot with color.

Fortunately the time had passed when emotions changed by the mere catching of some glance. The heart was bared to sensitiveness by the uplifting of Love's veil, but it was spared for a little while the pain which eyes may all innocently inflict.

There was no relenting. She did not spare herself. When once the fiat of duty has arisen within such a nature, the sophistry of tears falls like dew upon the rocks of Indus, and sighs are waste weeds that are cut to the root with decisive strokes of the pruning-hook. The ideal resolves into one of actuality. The good is awake, supple, prompt. The inner life is alert, ready to resist, strong to endure. The time was at hand when Gabrielle should crown this, when a great victory should make perfect the ideal of her nature and the womanly in her character, when life would reach its highest point, and the spiritual cover the earthly as with a garment from above.

When Andrew Wilson had spoken of George Percival to the Minister, it will be remembered that the latter was strangely moved by the mention of a name well known to him. Amy's frequent allusion to Mr. Percival's help and the untiring interest he had taken in their fortunes, her affectionate manner of breathing his name, the tenderness with which she described the old man's gratitude, and her tears while dwelling upon the sad episodes of that anxious time, so impressed Mr. Garland, that he resolved to find out this kind-hearted, large-souled fellow, and tell him of the old man's pathetic death, while re-assuring him as to the welfare of the little girl. The risk of being recognized did not trouble him, the lapse of time and change of features precluded likelihood of it, but in the event of such happening, he knew enough of the Percivals to feel satisfied his visit would be treated with every confidence.

Having ascertained Mr. Percival's address, the Minister proceeded to call. He found him within, and at work. The extreme order, the atmosphere of scholarship, and the grave thoughtfulness of the young man pleased Mr. Garland, who, at ease and akin with the author's pursuit, derived as great pleasure from the interview as did the other. Mr. Percival admitted his delight at being called upon by one whose writings he had long admired, and whose piety and goodness had caused him to wish some day or other to meet so eminent a man. Not disconcerted by being recognized, the Minister communicated the purport of his mission, and Mr. Percival was greatly moved to hear of the death of his old friend. Almost the first question he asked was relative to the clerk's little girl; his affectionate heart thrilled with solicitude on her behalf. Mr. Garland at once explained matters to him.

"You are interested in a child yourself, I think, Mr. Percival. Andrew Wilson said something of the kind."

The author's brow clouded.

"For a time I was, very much so. And you know, Mr. Garland, the frequent fate of idols of clay—we lose them."

"Unfortunately I do;" the Minister's voice was tremulous with emotion.

"What steps do you propose to take, Sir, in regard to Andrew Wilson's child? Forgive my asking, I have been so long indirectly interested in this little girl; I love children deeply."

The fresh candor, the gentleness, the chivalrous regard for childhood, won the Minister's most cordial appreciation, and he replied—

"She is now with my housekeeper, until I am successful in finding her a happy home, where she would be well looked after and treated with consideration. In due time she would be able to earn her own living, should it be necessary, although I prefer waiting until I can find a home where her future as well as her present might be looked upon as provided for."

"All that you have said, Sir, touches a chord inexpressibly tender within me. My quiet home, its books and studious occupation, and some engaging little one to break the spell of overwork, is my conception of the perfect in domestic life."

"As an old and staid married man, Mr. Percival, permit me to add one other item we steady-going folk are apt to consider an important one —a loving, ministering wife. I am privileged to speak from the experience of having possessed a home having that sweet associate in sympathy, and also with being deprived of it, and I do assure you no man of the refinement distinctively yours would ever be of two opinions about the balance of happiness."

"I do not dissent from you in the least, Sir. I yield to no one in my estimate of the value of a good woman and loving wife; but this has no bearing whatever upon the charm of an engaging little one in the house."

"Except this, that a wife is exceedingly useful to look after the engaging little one, if for nothing else." And as the Minister made the repartee, the kind smile giving pleasant point, he certainly thought he had the best of it. "Besides," he continued, "children require a deal of supervision, you know, Mr. Percival, and a literary man is the worst of all overlookers, being always absorbed, easily worried by small cares, seldom relaxing to that recreative extent demanded by companionship with childhood, and needing more intellectual company than childhood affords. If you were married and felt disposed to carry out your plan of adoption (as to which, by-the-way, I don't know whether you are serious); if you offered to bestow upon my friendless little *protégée* the comforts and care which I am sure she would receive in a house of which you were the head; entertaining the sentiments you do, it would be the product of happiness to both; and your definition of an 'engaging child' would, I am sure, be exactly realized, for she is both pretty and fascinating, although, perhaps, a little uncultivated."

All this time Mr. Percival had been gravely attentive. The Minister's proposition, half serious, half bantering, yet all through in characteristic sympathy, gave him cause for quiet reflection. He wished the proposal might take definite form.

"I am a man of very plain speech, Mr. Garland, and you are a minister of the Gospel, consequently accustomed to treating matters decorously; I will therefore, if you please, suppose the arrangement you casually allude to having tangible effect. In that case, is the little girl given up absolutely?"

"Absolutely, Sir. No poor orphan, sad to say, was ever more entirely destitute of any interest in her well-being: at this moment she has but one friend, myself, and I shall never lose sight of her. Wherever the home may be, whoever I may permit to take charge of her, while their control will be absolute I shall reserve the right, as I think it my duty, to continue her friend; not on the principle of interference, but in order that she may feel she has a friend and a home in addition to those where she will be reared. It annuls the horrid feeling of dependence, and counteracts the slavish experience of being so totally provided for."

Mr. Percival bowed. This subtle, tender thoughtfulness for the waif captivated him, and he replied—

"She would need no other friend in all the world, having one so good and true. All the same, I have no objection to become the guardian for whom you are in search."

"But the lady, Sir?" asked the Minister, gratified, yet still with an eye to the item he considered so all-important.

"I think I can speak for the lady," replied Mr. Percival, thoughtfully; "but let the other be settled first."

"Well, I declare you are incorrigible; you remind me of the man who bought his horse first and then built his stable."

"Quite right, too, I should think; it would have been stupid to build upon expectation."

"Yes; only while he was building, the horse ran—"

"Or was stolen!" added the author, with a wry face, while the Minister laughingly invited him to return to luncheon with him, and see the subject of their interest for himself. This Mr. Percival willingly assented to.

Amy, with her unreserved and affectionate ways, her quick intelligence and charm of manner, made a very favorable impression upon her future protector. Thus strangely commenced a union of perfect unselfishness on both sides, and of love that increased with every year that passed.

When George Percival left the Minister's house he went on to Queen Street, where he found his cousin alone. She was sitting by the window at work; no books nor manuscript now. The face was paler than of old, and more aged, but the sweetness, the resigned look, the deep spiritual light, the far-seeing reliance upon that Higher than earthly ties were all increased. Gabrielle had suffered, and the suffering had not made her strong—far from it. None but herself knew how weak it had made her; but it developed the gentleness while rendering the constancy magnificent.

So George told Gabrielle all that had occurred, and she turned now hot, now cold, and terribly agitated, yet subduing outward evidence of a severe and cruel struggle. Then George stood manfully face to face with this rare friend of a whole life, whose gentle ministry was even as a diadem, and whose loving worth needed no testing or proving, and he said—

"Come and be all that our friend has represented—the sweet associate in sympathy—the tender helper in my charge of the child—the loving, ministering wife!"

Holding his hands forth to her, and grasping hers, placed in his so warmly he never felt their trembling, their throbbing change from heat to cold.

Her lips were pressed close, her cheeks were colorless, her voice was distinct and clear.

"Yes, George, gladly; ever your associate in sympathy, your tender helper with the little one, but—not your wife. Cousins still, dear, please!"

Then with meek dignity she left the room, and in her chamber where but One saw, *conquered.*

Gabrielle was true to her resolution, and through all those years she kept his house had but his dearest interest at heart, and from first to last taught Amy *how* to love him.

The pangs, the agony, the exquisite ordeal, were never betrayed; no shadow of discontent or bitterness; not an interval's diminution of tender gentleness in her treatment of the child and conduct toward George, to whom, indeed, she was as she had ever been, no more, no less. Through all the years of widening honor and increasing prosperity and fame by which another was to profit; through all the years of that caressive fondness which a maiden yields to him she loves, and by which the patient worker outsat her own weak self, and became strong by virtue of the heroism; through all the years her cousin's fondness was changing to the grand deep passion, when for the first time she saw him *love*—through all, she still lived on, ay, and still loved on: mysterious heart of woman!

She had foreseen the issue when the proposal came, and for him gave up herself.

And even as where one suffers, another joys, Amy, grown beautiful, and with intellect moulded by his teaching, with a happy home found after all, and a kind regardful heart all hers, knew most perfect joy, and certainly strove to be worthy of it. And when the Minister would call, and George, with proud delight, admitted that it was to him they owed their present happiness, but one knew of the other side. Mr. Garland had long enough detected Gabrielle's share in it, and gave her a divided measure of that rarer friendship he gave to Constance, whose sister in his sympathy and thought she was. Lovely is such flower of friendship, surely of the loftier standard Addison meant—

> "And such a friendship ends not but with life."

In the Minister's regard Gabrielle joined that throng of saddened and weary ones to whom the world is all pain, life a long trial of patient endurance. Their eyes are tearless—they have wept passionate floods over broken idols, and can weep no longer; the tranquillity of resignation that comes after fierce battles and mighty struggles is theirs; the lips are roseless, drawn in by rigor of their pain; the hearts have lost the high hope that once made earth a long reach of sunshine and music; darling joys, once too precious to speak of, lie waste, and scarce bearing to be thought of; and they come with their agony lines, and clouded faith, and bruised patience, and benumbed affections, with all their sad retinue of sorrows, to the comforting words of some such man as this, and the tender and feeling look more priceless than the words.

The many acts of unspoken heroism in these quiet lives find no chronicle. Emotions to which no utterance can be given are the soul's true eloquence. Trembling, checked ambitions, which thrilled the tedious hours musically, too sacred ever to be described, too exquisite ever to be defined; the unfulfilled, fond wishes and dear dim dreams; the great soul-yearnings and the still small voice of hope—these die too often, and life's altar is strewn with disappointments, when there are none to chant the memory, and a world is gray with the ashes. Holy, bruised loves, crushed ideals, lowered from their faultless standard, glorious faith and trust-broken charms of spoiled illusions, lie on the heart like dead flowers—faded, loveless, but fragrant for so long! And a word will set the chords vibrating—sad music of harps when every string is broken—a look will flash upon the dark corners of the life sudden vividness, that beats broad until the memory and the pain step from behind, bared and bitter. There are points in some lives like shrouded mile-stones, whereon the distance to Pain and Death groweth never faint: they are not close together, but so blank and dispiriting, all the courage of great hearts and all the strength of great days can not but sink beside those stones. Long sweeps of sorrow and the voiceless crushing of mighty trouble, when there seemed no light in heaven, and the fair gate of Hope was closed, when worlds could not buy sympathy—even the mute love in the faithful eyes of some hound, when all was dead and dumb, even the dear forget-me-nots once encouraging tender promise. There have been struggles that can never be recounted, and there are the brave fallen by their banners, their morning-star bedimmed, their blue sky dark with the clouds that had no silver lining, their fair brows low-lying and uncrowned.

These were the calm, still natures Garland loved. The lowered voice, the tranquil mien, the subdued manner, and that light in the eye which tells of much lost, yet of more gained, all were the passport to his most precious friendship; and of those ennobled by this repose, although she had spoken no word of it to him, nor he to her, Gabrielle was ever beautiful in his esteem.

Who of those passing her in the street, not looking back for any thing that struck them in the face, yet haunted by the expression, would have guessed all that had influenced the sweet light shining there? How many of her poor, leaning on that, dreamed it had come of pain, beside which poverty was stingless, and all other ills were without hurt?

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT SUMMERS'S LIBRARY.

About this time all the walls and hoardings of London displayed announcements in large ornamental letters that Miss Vandaleur would shortly appear, with her celebrated Comedy-drama Company, at one of the West End theatres. A reputation of no mean order heralded the lady's appearance; in the provinces she had won golden opinions for a refined type of performance of the pathetic and poetic kind, and there appeared to be no doubt as to Miss Vandaleur's ultimate position on our stage. The lady came to England in the first place with Australian honors; the chief towns of Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales had formed a favorable, indeed flattering, estimate of her powers; and when her agent arrived at the antipodes to organize a starring tour through our provinces, a round of engagements was signed without difficulty, and the appearance of the new actress arranged for an early date. In due course the lady arrived, and made a successful *début*. The critical and discriminating audience present at her first appearance in this country, allowing for ruggedness and excess of emotional force, discerned rare histrionic excellence, particularly in that lighter expression of dramatic sensibility popularly associated with the French school. Miss Vandaleur scored a success, and was applauded; in successive towns she attracted large audiences. It was natural this brilliant artiste should desire to perform in the metropolis, and her ambition was to be gratified. It was settled that "The famous Australian Actress" should appear at a West End theatre; walls and hoardings were conspicuous with one huge word—Vandaleur; paragraphs in theatrical journals acquainted the public with the lady's triumphs in other parts of the big world; and the windows where portraits of celebrities were wont to stay the crowd exhibited a fresh face of a new type of loveliness, a mien and carriage that were emphatically queenly. In these portraits Miss Vandaleur looked about twenty-two, but she was in reality thirty-two. In all her journeyings, and they covered an extended area, Miss Vandaleur was accompanied by a tall, fine, handsome fellow, who seemed to do nothing but devote himself by day to providing for Miss Vandaleur's comfort, and by night to admiring her acting. It was understood this was Mr. Warburton; in private life the lady passed as Mrs. Warburton. Nobody believed it, but it was true nevertheless; aware it was not believed, she was yet too disdainful to flourish her certificate in every town she entered. Mr. Warburton had been a bush-ranger, but when he first made the acquaintance of the lady he was possessed of a comfortable little property on the Yarrowee, by Ballarat, and was so still, for that matter. All the comfortable little properties in the world would never lessen nor limit Kate's love for the stage; so, finding he could not cure nor quell, he, like the sensible man and devoted admirer he was, accompanied her whither she would; and he was useful at times, even if it did cast a reflection on her. Fortunately, reflections leave faint shadows. Kate did not mind in the least, quaffed Champagne, lived high at the best hotels, conducted herself with propriety, indulged extravagantly in dress, jewelry, and flowers—and paid for them, refused to take presents, was exceedingly attached—for an actress—to her husband, loved little boys, pug-dogs, beggar-men, and sculptors, and, like Mistress Gwynne, was exceedingly good to the poor, far more so, indeed, than is etiquette among virtuous women. At Ballarat, the man with the comfortable little property intimated that he was a widower; at Ballarat, the woman with beauty, fascination, and talent intimated that she was a widow; neither believed it, but it came to the same thing, and all doubts were consolidated at the altar. In the interests of honor we may bear witness that these asseverations were literally true; the first Mrs. Warburton was the daughter of a gentleman who would do any thing to oblige, in the interests of the flourishing general store of which he was sole proprietor. The first husband of the lady had been a sculptor of rising fame and marked genius, whose gifted life had been all too short, and all too troubled during that brief span, by this beauteous creature's longing for the stage. Her one child, a little boy beautiful as herself, had been placed with her father, who was poor, but so kind; she knew how kind he had ever been to her, knew he would be thus to the boy, and in this loving care placed him before leaving for Australia—we should like to say "with something of a pang," but it was scarcely so. When ladies are leaving for abroad to form professional engagements, little boys are rather in the way.

This was Kate Vandaleur. We think we have heard of her before in the progress of this history. Yes! But we have not heard all; how that, even in the bosom of such a one after a while, the glory of foot-light victories is wearisome in quieter moods, and the feverish excitement attendant upon ambition is painful compared with the domestic happiness of other women whom they meet in private life, and whose unruffled existence excites the sometime envy of those held captive by the tyranny of popularity.

A certain shop in the occupation of one Mr. Summers had, in addition to the prestige for elegancies characterizing many West End establishments, been, for a considerable number of years, thought highly of in the district; first, for a large well-stocked circulating library; secondly, for supplying the public with box-tickets for the theatres; and thirdly, for its extensive and choice array of plain and colored photographs of notable people of the day. In short, Edward Summers's was a distinctly fashionable house of business, much patronized, and the owner whereof had, by scrupulous attention and uniform courtesy, realized an independency. The shop was near to the house of Mr. Greville Lovelace, and that gentleman was one among its numerous patrons; and since he disliked entering the shops himself, he did as others do—sent the least stupid of his servants for such works or articles as he might require; and of late, for more special commissions, he had dispatched his pupil, who would perform them with as nice perfection as he could wish.

One day Arthur was thus on literary errand when Mr. and Mrs. Warburton were in the shop upon business connected with their box office. The lady's eyes were riveted immediately, her stately grace unbent beneath the sublime prompting of maternity, and with great agitation she went to the boy and addressed him by name; then, when he looked up with the splendid eyes, passionately eager, wistfully loving, she knew her own, and, kneeling, took him to her heart. Mr. Warburton, familiar with his lady's liking for beautiful boys, and aware of the cause, was accustomed to her taking a warm interest in their behalf, but had never seen her thus affected; and he went to her with a word or two of kind remonstrance. The gentlemen of the shop attributed the outburst to "the custom with Australian professional ladies," and attended to their business; but the proprietor, who was of deeper and superior insight, at once invited the lady and boy into the house, and conducted them to a pretty chamber where they could talk in private at leisure. Mr. Warburton warmly thanked him for his timely and considerate politeness, and remained in the shop.

Alone with her son, the woman who once played this scene, and with such force and pathos that it made her reputation—few knowing at the time how she had suffered—with loving fervor took him upon her knee, parting the curls, gazing through tears at the fair brow recalling his father's, and looking deep into the eyes so full of poetry and love.

"And does my boy remember me?"

"I should not, had you not known me first. I have been cherishing a recollection of some one, but it was no one so grand as you are; I think more like what you used to be."

That went to her heart. He recalled the quieter days—a recollection just then of pain.

"And did you think, my dear, I should never come home to England any more? that I had forgotten you, and—and grandfather—dear grandfather?"

His face clouded in an instant. Without replying, he said, with tender simplicity, "Of course you can not know—and we moved after you had gone, to a poorer place, but more in the country—he is dead." This was uttered with the mournful echo which almost signified that the recovery of this brilliant and courted mother scarcely compensated for the loss of that beloved guardian of his youth. She felt this also; but the grief she experienced upon hearing of her father's death, if of no intensity, was sufficient to overpower those other emotions. She shed a few more tears at that—tears of sorrow, more of penitence; she knew well enough that never a word nor deed on her part had done aught toward linking him to life, or strengthening the frail tendons which keep the heart from breaking; and she wept, as the thoughtless do weep, once in a way, and when a past trails up with its reproaching weird reminder, hugging her boy close, as grateful that this was still left her to do better by and to love—between intervals of stage love—and to be thoughtful for, until the crowd's applause rendered this new affection dim, faint, stripped of its novelty, lessened of its pleasure.

"Where are you living now, Arthur?"

"I am apprenticed to a gentleman—a sculptor; and I like it. He is very kind, and helps me with my studies as well. I love him for it, and all he has done for me, and I hope never to leave him." This said the boy, vaguely apprehensive that she would wish to remove him—a course he would have opposed with firmness. No; the lady had no wish to do so. She felt glad to hear he was following in his father's footsteps—glad to hear he was so well provided for and happy. The passing emotion which had moved her vanished, not quite so quickly as when she was overcome by sudden pathos in the progress of her dramas, but yet did pass, leaving her composed Mary Warburton, and, above all things, Kate Vandaleur. Any situation imperilling her existence as that largely placarded being would have been most remorselessly warred against. But she must see her boy often—a stroke of hopeful tenderness in the stipulation—and Arthur affectionately welcomed this promise; and when he went to tell his friend of the strange occurrence, that friend, while gratified it was no worse, resolved that for the future he would send some one else on errands to Summers's Library.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT HAPPENED UPON THE ROAD TO SHOREHAM.

WEEK-NIGHT services are mainly supported by the very good and the very bad; the medium class of attendants upon religious duty confine their worship to the Sabbath. Mr. Garland had made an undoubted impression upon John Beech, who, under his improving influence, had not only become a respectable member of the community, but also a thoroughly pious and reformed character. A great transformation was here, in the conversion of this man to reverent conduct, honest dealing, and serious reflection. John Beech was regular in his attendance at the week-night services; but if Mr. Garland failed to preach, he would walk out again with the bluntness which still remained an unconvertible trait. It was a dogged regard he entertained for the Minister; he must have the Gospel at his hands or none at all. Had the Minister been removed or "translated," Mr. Beech's piety would have gone from him. His conversion was not built upon a very reliable basis, it will be thought, yet so it was, and there are more of the Beech order about. Herein lies the secret of success attending some revivalists. Mr. Garland was not a revivalist, but the principle and the influence were similar. It is the power of sympathy. Some bodies are sympathetic, and yield generously their sublime gift to suffering humanity; others may be refined sevenfold, but never a drop nor grain of the precious quality are they able to communicate. Mr. Beech was rich in English obstinacy, and though an angel had assured him of it, he would never have believed the Gospel was as priceless from another's ministry, or that any among the sons of men could be as good or better than his friend.

The elder Mrs. Beech had been sent for to join her husband, greatly to her wonder and satisfaction, and from that time strife ceased to be the daily portion of the poor woman. It seemed a new lease of life, it gave promise of a calm ending to her years, and her heart warmed with gratitude when John said, "The Minister has done it all."

Upon the cab-rank at the Old Steine, Driver No. 175 was one evening hailed, soon after dusk, by a tall man of business-like appearance, yet wearing an air of pleasure-seeking. By the gaslight Beech saw a white hat with a black band round, beneath which sharply prominent features, a florid face, and a voracious-looking head; under the ears and chin a standing collar, richly illustrated with little black imps brandishing pitchforks; below this mediæval study was a long brown coat, very much the worse for wear; and around the throat, tied in a fashion popularly supposed to be native to sailors, was a crimson neckerchief. The gentleman, whom cab-driver No. 175 imagined to be connected with the turf, carried a short and thick stick under his arm.

"Shoreham Gardens!" said the tall man, taking his seat. This was a good fare, for the Gardens—a resort much frequented by summer pleasure-seekers—was some five or six miles along the coast, west. But Mr. Beech was honest now, and he said—

"If it's the Gardens you are going to, Sir, they're not open."

"Never mind," said the man in the brown coat, lighting a cigar; "drive half the way and back. It's going to be a pleasant evening, I can see."

Beech demurred no longer, and the man was driven on. Along the sea-line, past the palatial stretch of dwellings, and then out into the dark country; a lonely road in spite of distant lights and the glow of red behind above the town of Brighton. Past a toll-gate where, while the driver paid, the traveller leaned back, so that the light in the window did not fall upon him. Then on to a darker extent, where lights became fainter and the red glow more dim. The sea sounded dismally here, the pale light that seemed to hover upon it being distinct and ghastly. A cart passed them; John Beech called a cheery "Good-night, mate!" and the man answered in the same civil strain. A star was born, twinkled feebly, and shortly died, and the arch was gloomy again; the night must have been chosen for its gloom by this gentleman partial to a country drive, for when that star appeared he twirled his cigar at it defiantly, as though to frighten its feeble light away; and he did so, or at all events it was seen no more. No vehicle passed them nor any one upon foot; there was no house near, and the track, desolate by day even, at night presented a blankness and dreariness apparently relished by the traveller, for he laughed to himself horribly while fumbling at something stowed away in a pocket deep in his old brown coat. The low shore shelved to the water, with a ridge of waste land between it and the road; on the other side was a broad area partly cultivated, but all unseen during this night journey, and possessed of no especial beauty at any time. The man in the cab had proceeded far enough for his purpose, and he called out in a jovial manner to the driver to stop.

"Stretch my legs, I think." He stepped lightly on to the road and shook himself, patted the horse, walked round the cab, and said, "I'll settle with you now, my man."

He put his hand under his coat, for his purse Beech supposed. He brought, however, a weapon from under, which he held behind him while looking carelessly at the girth.

"Something loose here, my worthy friend, and we shall be upset if you don't look out."

John Beech came off the box to the side of his mare, and stooped to look at her harness. Then the man in the brown coat raised the hand grasping a deadly weapon, and felled the other with one blow.

"A message from your friend Noel Barnard, Beech: no answer required."

With which brutal pleasantry he discharged another crushing blow, and, bending over the poor wretch, observed curtly to himself, "Finishes that little item!" The victim of this savage assault was motionless as the dead, with blood flowing profusely from two terrible wounds. Then Bartholomew Rolf turned the horse and cab into the waste to wander at will, cast the weapon used to the black line of shore, to be washed hence by the waves or left, he cared not which, and betook himself to walk to Portsmouth.

Anxiously Mrs. Beech awaited her husband's return long after the usual time of his coming home. Edward Street is noisy and given to brawls and turmoil, and the woman stood at the door impatient, hoping her husband had not got into any trouble, nor was staying away purposely in consequence of any thing she had said that he might not have liked. He might have a longer fare than usual, a party somewhere, or people going a long distance home from the theatre.

A woman passed whom she knew; she was returning from a vain effort to induce her husband to come from the society of congenial tavern mates, and Mrs. Beech accosted her.

"Have you seen my good man about, ma'am?"

"No, but I've see my bad un, and it's sight enough for one night;" and she went in bitterly.

Mrs. Beech waited another hour, and then went down to the rank. The men were changed for the night duty; no one had seen 175 take up a fare; but his cab was absent. She went on to the yard; it was not there. By lantern light a man was cleansing some mud off a wheel with a wisp of straw. She asked him if he had seen her husband. He said he didn't know her husband, and didn't want, and women were not allowed down the yard at that time of the night. She hurried to the master's house; lights were in the lower rooms, where some of his friends were carousing. She knocked humbly, and asked to speak to the master a moment. He came out into the passage, heard her, and said she was a fool, and if his men's wives began bothering him, he would only employ single ones. Time was when Mrs. Beech would have fought him for the argument; now she was an altered woman, and she retired sadly and quietly. All night she sat up waiting for the absent; she had received kindness from him of late, and a man is double a man and thrice a husband who is not niggardly with his kindness. The gray dawn arose to close her watching; people were about early in Edward Street; those of the house were astir; and then the woman fell asleep in her chair, gray, and white, and alone, to be roused shortly by men outside and shuffling of feet upon the landing. They had brought him home, and a sorry sight it was the woman awoke to. A market gardener's cart coming to Brighton saw the body by the wayside, and pulled up to help. The man was not dead, thanks to the cool breeze from the sea, and he faintly told his name and lodging. Then the gardener with difficulty raised the helpless sufferer, and placed him with great consideration in his cart, resting the feeble being against his sturdy self.

"You're in for it, old fellow. What's come to ye?" he inquired, slowly and kindly.

"Murder!" moaned the other.

"A quarrel, maybe?"

"Yes, a quarrel; and it's gone agin me, as I allus thought it would."

And Beech was taken to the house in the street named, and borne up the stairs by strange and rough yet kindly hands.

One carried the news to the police, and they visited the scene; another carried it to the master, and he went down to his yard; the woman carried it to the Minister, and the Minister came to the man.

The police took particulars of the place where the body had been lying, and a root of the crimson-dyed grass. The master found his cab and his horse uninjured, the latter having returned deliberately and at her own convenience to the yard, so the proprietor returned to his roll and coffee, intending to send the girl round later to inquire how the man was proceeding. He supposed he had fallen from the box, and vowed he should be dismissed from his employ. It was of no consequence; the Minister found the man dying. He had sent his wife for Mr. Garland, not for a medical man. "The Minister will be of the most use to me now," he said; so the Minister came instantly.

"Close the door, please," he asked, softly, "and tell the people below to be quiet for one hour." He believed his poor convert would not outlive that time. Seating himself by the bed, he took the brown hand in his, and, pressing it, spake with infinite tenderness and gravity—

"Tell me any thing weighing upon your mind, all you wish done, or whatever of the past may be a trouble. Then I want you to forget every thing, and give your whole thoughts to the solemn change you will enter upon so soon."

It was said very sweetly, not to frighten in the least; it almost carried happiness with it.

"We will quite finish with earth first," continued the Minister, "and then there will be nothing to draw off your attention from the more joyful prospect breaking upon you."

"I've been a bad un," moaned the man.

"Fear not! Really repentant, you can leave all in the hands of your just and forgiving God." He had been going to say "judge," but with a delicate tact pre-eminently his own, foresaw the term would pierce the quivering conscience.

"My wicked deeds and dreadful words!—My life's bin the blackest going!" He turned restlessly, writhing with the agony of that swift review of crime.

"My friend," said the Minister, softly, yet with firmness, "at this moment, when you have so short a time to listen to me, I would not deceive you by one word; and when I tell you the deeds and words will be forgiven you if you are truly penitent, you may verily believe your God in His mercy will, for the sake of His dear Son, in whom is your trust, blot the whole of them out of your life and His remembrance."

With another pressure of the hand, touching for its affection, the man murmured, "I am! I am!" and then raising himself slightly, he looked over toward a rude trunk, and in a low voice begged the Minister would take from it a sheet of paper: upon the mantel-shelf was an ink-bottle and pen. "Now write," he begged, and the Minister quickly made space for the paper, and prepared to write as the dying man dictated. The voice grew fainter and fainter, but all he wished was written upon the paper; then the woman was summoned, and in their presence he signed it, and the last sad scene took place.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GATHERING OF THE VULTURES.

The Tribunal of Goddesses was sitting upon the great Garland case, and there was a crowded court. It arose in this manner: Miss Penelope and her invaluable jury had not been in the house of the Comdarlingtons two days before they scented something wrong, and found that it would be necessary to hold the assize in Brighton. It was with the Comdarlingtons' Minister that something was wrong: they had entertained grave suspicion of this at a distance, had felt specially called upon to visit this gay and dangerous town, and, despite Lady Comdarlington's repeated assurance of his being such a love of a man, they were determined to go on with it, and place the popular favorite in his true colors before the world. They were upon their mettle; the issue of the metropolitan campaign had sharpened their appetite, and rendered them more than usually acute.

They commenced with caution. Naturally the person who would, no doubt, be intimately acquainted with all that was going on, would be the leading office-bearer of the church—the approach to an office-bearer is by means of his wife. Dear Lady Comdarlington knew Mrs. Lurch from having met her at bazars and other places (indeed, Mrs. Lurch, with fussy pretension, made herself known every where), and this valuable auxiliary was called in. It was the preliminary movement, setting the barrier an inch or two aside, whereby at an enlarged gap would rush in the whole horde of vulgarians. For could not Mrs. Lurch report that dear Miss Caddie, that inestimable spinster, had seen the Minister standing before the portrait of Constance Evelyn, the lovely creature who had suddenly quitted Brighton, and was now, as could be incontestably proved, living with Mr. Garland at that lonely house which nobody would ever pass and nobody could ever find, the housekeeper of this establishment having been conveniently sent off? Every goddess bristled at this sensational account, and when Mrs. Lurch majestically erected her imposing cap, and, looking the convocation in the face, submitted the desirability of calling in Miss Caddie, there was a general expression of approval.

"Lady Comdarlington presents her compliments to Miss Caddie, and hopes for the pleasure of her company to tea." Mrs. Lurch drove off in the brougham the bearer of this missive, and presently returned with the charming Lottie, fluttering at the honor, all unconscious of the inevitable "few friends to meet you," and almost overcome on entering the drawing-room at having to encounter the stony inspection of so many stern-looking maiden ladies. Miss Caddie was naturally possessed of extraordinary sweetness, and this agreeable quality she had cultivated to a pitch of exotic pleasantness. Thus this mixing of cream and sugar with so much vinegar might, one would fear, have produced an utterly unpalatable concoction; but then it was just as possible some eminently seasonable and piquant salad might come of it. Miss Caddie was not impressed by the guests of her hostess; their coldly critical aspect seemed calculated to warp even the delicate surface of scandal itself, and this presiding oracle, who was in her way supreme, felt jealous for the honor of her unclean pickings. Miss Caddie's long connection with Japan had spoiled her taste for beauty, that is to say, for Saxon beauty; thus the impressive court then sitting did not woo her to that close and ardent confidence she had anticipated. Nevertheless, Miss Caddie, like her really good tea in the bequeathed tea-pot, was to be drawn, and finding her friends reserved was greatly mortified. Mrs. Lurch explained aside to dear Lady Comdarlington that her friend had left at home an inseparable and bosom-friend, whom she thought Miss Caddie felt grieved to leave there alone, although she would on no account have failed in her attendance upon Lady Comdarlington's pleasure. At which the countess naturally expressed regret that Miss Caddie should have run away from her bosom-friend, and nothing would set it right but that she should send her own carriage for this friend of their friend Miss Caddie, who was entreated to write a tiny note at the elegant escritoire of the countess, and did so with a relish, sincerely desiring the invaluable bosom-one might be let in for a similar treat to that which had befallen herself.

"Dear darling Kitty, it is all right. Mrs. Lurch has managed it; you are to come. Such an exquisite house (we are improving our visiting acquaintance, dear)! Don't lose a minute; you will find a Honiton collar in the small drawer, and my curl comb on the looking-glass. Ever your attached friend, enjoying herself finely,

"C. C."

"And I hope she'll like it when she gets here," said the tender-hearted correspondent, biting her lip and not knowing which way to look under those twenty-six fossil eyes, for the goddesses did not move nor speak, but sat staring stonily, watching events, and waiting.

Mrs. Lurch (who was very rarely discomposed, least of all by people staring, for she always thought they were admiring her cap) and the countess kept the conversation from flagging; but an agreeable diversion ensued owing to the unexpected arrival of the Hon. Mrs. Glover, with Miss Fanny Glover, accompanied by Lady Pepper. These ladies being accustomed to good society, and in the habit of meeting mixed parties, were no way discomposed either; and when her ladyship said, "Now you will stay tea with us, and have a little quiet chat?" they, having come on purpose, did so; the truth being, as they soon explained (greedily caught up by the insatiable goddesses), that they were greatly concerned about dear Lady Ellerby and Mr. Garland. He had been seen riding with her, seen to enter the house, both in the unsuspecting Lord Ellerby's lamented absence. It was very sad, it was no business of theirs, they did not care a pin, but knowing how intimate their friend (the countess) was with both, they had just come to see if she knew a few particulars. Such a shocking thing! They had always thought so highly of the Minister. The air was thick with rumor, they feared something terrible was about to happen; they hated an exposure above all things, and having been members of his church it would be so much worse; it was a sort of reflection upon themselves!

At every fresh word the heads of those who had come purposely to try the case bobbed and craned, and the sensitive cartilage of their ears appeared to distend with hungry zest. Their leader was making mental note with the obstinate system of some uncommonly shrewd, sharp, and sour counsel.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich arrived. She wore the dark green silk, with the Honiton collar. The sand-colored curls were adjusted with consummate care, and not in the least disarranged, for the clever Kitty availed herself of the opportunity to come without her bonnet. "They'll be obliged to send me home as well if I don't go in my bonnet," reasoned the gushing maiden, never above taking an advantage. Another thing, it was not every day Miss Ticklewich had the chance of being driven along in a carriage with a private crest upon the panels, therefore she would let her friends and the public well inspect, upon this occasion, her three-quarter, framed, bonnetless portrait, by keeping in good view of the rest of Brighton, plodding along upon foot. And the poor who passed—*his* pensioners—little thought her one of the witnesses sent for toward establishing the guilt of him who so entirely lived for others.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich arrived just as Lady Comdarlington was saying, "Well, I always told Flora what a duck of a man he was, but I had no idea she thought so too." And further remark was checked by her ladyship rising to welcome the winsome visitor. Miss Kitty's artlessness took at once. Although in years as old as the leading goddess, she was still one of those endearing creatures the whole band of sisters instantly felt they could pet and cherish; and the feeling spread, so good an effect dawned with the appearance of the vivacious Kitty. Miss Caddie, not to be out-shone in sweetness by her bosom-friend, relaxed visibly, and anon the assembly was like unto a bank of honey-bees.

After tea, proceedings commenced. Over tea the talk was chiefly upon dress and local events. The countess, a martyr to languor, surrendered her post of honor to Miss Penelope, who acquitted herself with characteristic grace. Not unusually, therefore, Miss Penelope retained the presidency afterward, and introduced the topic they were all dying to commence upon. Not having been a fashionable tea nor a dress occasion, but so entirely a homely meeting one with another, Lady Comdarlington complied with Miss Penelope's request that tea should be had upon the table, in the good old-fashioned and thoroughly comfortable manner. After tea the company remained still at the board, chatting pleasantly, Miss Penelope at the head; and when the servants had quitted the room, and there seemed an interlude of temporary quietude, she was sitting easily back in her chair and staring straight before her, into vacancy it might be thought, but really into the complex and very serious matters about to engage their undivided attention. Miss Penelope, thus preoccupied, tendered a quiet observation—

"How are the mighty fallen!"

And immediately a hush fell upon the assembly; the next moment every one was bursting to say something, and said it. Miss Penelope had unloosed the carrion-hunters, and, vulture-like, they lost not a moment in descending upon their prey, as with one breath, the burden whereof was this—

LADY COMDARLINGTON (*diminuendo*). "We are so surprised; our friend, whom we thought perfection!"

LADY PEPPER (*espressivo*). "It is quite a blow to us; we shall never trust any one again!"

HON. MRS. GLOVER (*variamento*). "One really doesn't know whom to believe nowadays!"

MISS FANNY GLOVER (*sfuggito*). "It's scarcely nice to talk about, but what is one to do?"

MRS. LURCH (*pratico*). "I've told Lurch he ought to withdraw immediately, but he doesn't see it."

MISS CADDIE (*quieto*). "For a very long time I have had my suspicions; it has quite upset me!"

MISS TICKLEWICH (*teneramente*). "The best of men are the worst, and we've always thought so!"

MISS HEBE (*puntato*). "Apparently so spiritually minded! O whited sepulchre!"

MISS PHYLLIS (*lamentoso*). "One could weep over such a fall; how guarded one should be!"

MISS MINERVA (*grandioso*). "I am always fearful for these exalted people! It is very sad."

MISS DIANA (*crescendo*). "I am sorry for the large number of families he has visited!"

MISS VESTA (*delicatissimo*). "Only to think of the poor lost creature now at the Grange!"

MISS HERMIONE (*pianissimo*). "I think I've heard there's a Moat; hush-sh-sh!"

MISS CIRCE (*indeciso*). "He may have been greatly tempted, poor man! Alas! we do not know all!"

MISS DIDO (*debile*). "It makes me feel quite faint; one can not bear too much! What's the time?"

MISS LEDA (*decissimo*). "What is there bad enough to say of such a character?"

MISS THETIS (*ardito*). "Society should rise up against this traitor, and avenge itself!"

MISS IPHIGENIA (*impetuoso*). "I think no minister has the right to remain unmarried!"

MISS EVADNE (*tranquillo*). "One should at all times be prepared for the worst."

MISS PENELOPE (*ostinato*). "But let us hear the facts of the case."

It can not be said there was a room full, for the Comdarlington residence was spacious, but there undoubtedly was a room full of noise when the council of twenty were all talking at once.

"Yes," said Miss Caddie; "before saying any thing, we should hear the facts of the case. These, as I understand them, are very serious—very serious; indeed, a worse or more convincing or more extensive charge was never brought against any one!"

"Quite true, Miss Caddie!" said Aunt Penelope, who thus far did not know what it was.

"It resolves itself into a threefold accusation. First, the Minister decoys hither, by offering her needy father a comfortable curacy, a young girl whom he has known in some previous and I conceive less honorable sphere. Having had the girl brought to Brighton, he has the open audacity to remove her to a village hidden away amidst the Downs, where in a mysterious old house she is the captive of this perfidious Brigham Young. Ladies, you will be surprised at my bringing in the name of that heathen prophet; it is because the other accusatory clauses justify my use of an allusion to that person. For, not content with this horrible misdemeanor, he must needs seek also to entice away the affections of a beautiful young wife—I am thinking of Lady Ellerby, whom my dear friend Miss Ticklewich saw with her own eyes in close company with Mr. Garland in a shut-up carriage. As if this were not enough, the worst case of all remains to be stated—there have been darkly mysterious goings on between the Minister and this Lady Lindon people are so fond of talking about; he has visited at her house and been admitted to her private boudoir—a privilege granted to no one else; he was at her reception, although nowhere else all the season; and lastly has gone down and taken apartments at a cottage close to her country-seat. Now, ladies?"

Miss Caddie had spoken; she felt she had spoken well, and had done her duty.

"Bless you, my child!" murmured Mrs. Lurch, under her breath; and then, to Miss Penelope, "I am thankful I never would consent to take the Communion at the hands of Mr. Garland."

"Madam," replied Miss Penelope, impressively, "my confidence in man is so slight I never have taken it, and until administered by one of our own sex I never will."

Then Miss Penelope curtly turned to address the committee sitting upon the misdeeds of the apostate preacher.

"We have all heard the report of our friend, put, I must say, in a concise and considerate manner—for this is not a nice or thankful duty that Miss Caddie has so delicately performed—and I am convinced it has been a painful office to speak as she has done; but don't you trouble, my dear, you will have your reward. Now my sisters and myself have travelled about a good deal, and unconsciously to ourselves have had forced upon us a vast amount of the unpleasant side of the human race; we acknowledge this, to the disgrace of mankind; conjointly we have tried to improve it, and have met with much opposition. From the days of Pharaoh downward man's heart has been prone to hardness and perversity, and very often, I do assure you, it has been like trying to carve the rocks, so stubborn has been the reception accorded our efforts in the interests of decency and right." (Noticing some whispering, Miss Penelope stopped. It was her sister Dido who had offended; she was just asking Miss Ticklewich if she had a biscuit in her pocket, that was all. And darling Kitty found one there; it had been there some months and without paper, and she whisperingly replied while handing it, "I hope you don't object to seeds, dear!" It would adjust the condiment flavor. Quite happy, Miss Dido answered, "No, dear," then, under the table, broke it in her pocket-handkerchief and conveyed a portion to her mouth, which was constituted upon the same principle as a fish's and required to be in perpetual motion. This it was which had aggrieved the presiding goddess, and it was not until quietness was restored that she would proceed.) "If I understand the facts of this case aright, the crimes imputed to this person are, so far as our present information is to be relied upon, threefold; and we have a clergyman's daughter and two ladies of title implicated. Ladies, it is a delicate piece of business!"

"For my part," whispered the countess to Lady Pepper, "I don't see how they could help it. But, there, I give him up; he really carries it too far, you know. There's moderation in all things, and a line must be drawn."

Miss Ticklewich gave a premonitory, almost a playful, little cough: Miss Ticklewich wished to speak. Miss Penelope glanced in her direction with condescension, as implying she might, if so disposed, address the tribunal. At first Miss Ticklewich seemed inclined to simper, but ultimately signified her readiness to look at the grave side of things by becoming apparently serious. "I think it well to say," began the dark green and sand-colored vestal, "that when out walking the other day, my steps unconsciously wandered in the direction of Hawkingdean. [Simper.] Unwittingly I walked around the garden boundary. Without knowing what I was doing, I found myself gazing between the thickly clustered trees, when I suddenly discerned two figures sitting close together." (Simper.)

"Yes?" The presiding lady, with elongated neck and rapt interest, in which the whole important assembly joined, awaited with eagerness the revelation their dear friend was upon the eve of disclosing.

"They were the Rev. Mr. Garland [seriously] and Miss Evelyn [very seriously]. They talked. I did not want to listen, but voices, which prompted Joan of Arc to act contrary to her wishes, prompted me and whispered my duty. I listened."

"Yes?" Miss Penelope was scarcely able to restrain the virtuous impatience racking her Amazonian frame.

"They were talking of a child." Every goddess arose, reared, arching themselves, and red as capsicums. The other ladies, with the exception of the countess, although not less agitated, retained their seats. Lady Comdarlington, with honeyed accents, remarked to the Hon. Mrs. Glover, "This is getting delicious, dear. But how could she help it? Bless me! I've given the wretch up. Did you ever know such a naughty, handsome, rakish, perfidious one?"

"I think, Fanny," said the Hon. Mrs. Glover, with solicitude, addressing her only daughter, to whom, of course, this sort of thing was quite novel, "it will be as well if you leave the room, dear."

"Yes, ma." Miss Glover, who looked the elder of the two, arose with her forefinger between her lips, her head inclined on one side, eyes modestly bent down, and slowly quitted the court.

"Is there any other lady who can't stand this abominable exposure?" Asked by Aunt Penelope, with an expressive side look, conveying to her staff that it would be more decorous to rise and retire while the business of the court proceeded with closed doors. But all declined to catch their leader's meaning this time, with the exception of Miss Dido, who trotted out in the wake of the various elegant confections that had graced the tea-table.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich proceeded, amidst a silence painful in its intensity—

"Miss Evelyn said, 'If our little darling could but be brought here—and I see no reason against it—it is so retired, no one would be aware of it, and if discovered, could not possibly tell it to be yours."

With a stifled shriek, Miss Caddie sank back in her chair, feeling her laurels were already departing from her, and much she wished that Kitty had been left at home in obscurity.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ROSE RECEIVES AN INVITATION.

One day Rose called upon Mr. Garland: he at once detected it was to tell him something. To this child was extended the privilege of doing as she pleased in his study. She knelt by the table at which he was sitting, and slowly taking a letter from her pocket she looked half sadly up in the face beside her. He knew there was something coming; the love he bore the child told him it was something to part them. He thought very likely she was going to school—the general ending to a friendship with a pretty child. No; this was an invitation simply; she passed him the letter without explanation; it was addressed to Mrs. Blake.

"Am I to read this, Rose?"

She nodded assent and he read it.

"The Cottage, Sleperton. *Tuesday.*

"My dear Mrs. Blake,—Our acquaintance in the summer, although brief, was so agreeable, that I have never ceased to think of yourself and dear little daughter with warm affection. I am only sorry I can not leave the Cottage or I should certainly pay a flying visit to Brighton, purposely to see you; but it is in your power to come and see me and make a nice long stay, bringing pretty Rose along with you. I will try to make you very comfortable, and I am quite sure your dear girl would enjoy the change; for although Seaborough may be any thing but a cheerful place in winter-time, I assure you, at the Cottage we understand the happy art of passing the season pleasantly. I have not the privilege of knowing Mr. Blake, but I am sure, from all I have heard, he is kindness itself and will not stand in the way of your visit. At all events, if you can not come and see me, allow Rose to do so; I shall be in London for the day on Friday next, and could meet her at London Bridge, if you will write me the train convenient. And how have you been, dear? Very well, I trust; I hope to see you both looking more beautiful than ever.

"You did me the honor to admire some of my sketches; I shall be happy to develop the taste for drawing which I am convinced your Rose possesses.

"With kindest regards, believe me, very sincerely your friend, Anna Vincent."

He became rather thoughtful after reading it, and then asked—

"Well, what did mamma say?"

"'Bother the woman and her Cottage! If she knew how much I detest letter-writing, she would not take the trouble to write to me!'"

The Minister smiled at the piece of philosophy.

"But papa said he thought it very kind, a polite attention, and that it would be a nice little holiday for me."

"And what does Rose say to it?" asked the Minister, with anxious tenderness.

"I like Mrs. Vincent; she was very kind to me."

"Which means that you would like to go?"

"I should, if *you* could go."

"But I am not asked!" Playfully humoring her fancy.

"Come and see me if I do go," said the child, earnestly, "and perhaps we shall be able to look at some more of the pictures in the Manor-house."

"What would Mrs. Vincent think?"

This was not to be answered, and Rose thoughtfully returned the letter to her pocket.

"But you have not told me whether you are going or not?"

"Mamma said, 'She is undoubtedly clever, and it may be a good thing for Rose;' papa said, 'I do not think we ought to look at it in that light; your friend invites Rose as a guest, not as a pupil.' 'Just so,' said mamma, 'but if she can, at the same time, be picking up some accomplishment, so much the better. When I was a girl I was never allowed to visit where I did not learn something.'"

Rose delivered this with inimitable gravity, the Minister trifling with his pen, trying, as he had often before tried, to reconcile the nature of child and mother. He was thrilled by her rising, coming close, and intwining an arm about him. "Do *you* mind my going?"

It was so pretty, so thoughtful, he could not, if he would, deprive her of the pleasure.

"I? No, Rose, if it makes you happy. By-the-bye, do you know if her son is at home?"

A delicate blush overspread her cheeks; for a minute she seemed inclined to burst into tears.

"I never thought of that. But what does it matter if he is? I shall always be at needle-work or something or other with Lorry's mamma."

The Minister merely straightened the envelopes in the divisions of his case, placed stray sheets of note and letter paper in decorous companionship, folded half a quire of blotting-paper into book shape, and boxed up loose pens wandering and mixed; then turned, taking her to him. She knew his moods too well to wonder, and with a loving smile just nestled there.

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He felt dull when she was gone, was dull on the Thursday; and all day Friday his housekeeper saw but little of him, he was so busy writing in his study. She knew he prepared his sermon on Friday, and did not trouble him.

On Saturday he called upon his poor. They thought him kinder than ever; he was always kindest when inwardly disturbed.

On the Sunday he preached two of the most impressive discourses ever heard within that church. Beautiful Lady Ellerby did not rise to the last hymn, the spell of the preacher's eloquence was too much for her sensitive heart; emotion caused her to tremble, and she dreaded lest it should be observed.

He had been more than usually tried during the past week; all the efforts put forward with the hungering desire to discover the retreat of his wife and child had failed miserably, and he was very depressed in consequence. This more than any thing seemed to envelop him in shadow. At such times small things add to the weight oppressing one; the departure of Rose was one of these: he looked upon the pew where a little face was wont to be, and saw the genial chemist, his imposing lady, and—a blank.

He was very tired and pale. Going out, he met with one of his parishioners, who remarked at once how well he was looking; some people would address their stock congratulation to the dying.

He was not well for all that, and on the Monday he drove to Hawkingdean.

His parting instructions to the housekeeper in Brighton were, "Don't send any letters on; I must be free from care for a day or two." By the evening post a letter arrived, in child-like handwriting, and bearing the Seaborough stamp. Mrs. Sanderson ventured to disobey her employer's injunction, and sent this letter on. Thus it came about the Minister received the following missive:

"SLEPERTON, *Sunday.*

"DEAR MR. GARLAND,—I did not tell you I would write, in case I couldn't; but I meant to do so if it was possible, and I could write without being looked over, which I don't like at all; and this afternoon Mrs. Vincent is up in her room, and told me to make use of her desk and write to mamma, telling her I am enjoying myself. I have just done so, and now write a line to you, telling you I am not enjoying myself because you are not with me—"

Here there was a change into the elegant penmanship of the accomplished widow—

"I have just surprised our charming fairy at her confidence. Will you not make her happy by coming to see us, and staying some time at the Cottage? Pray do; I wish it, and shall think it a personal kindness. Come any time agreeable, no ceremony, you are always welcome. We are quite alone, and Rose sadly wants some one to take her out; I go out so little in the winter."

He thought this an odd interpolation, but read on where the child had resumed the writing—

"I am to add my persuasion; you know how I wish it; come for my sake. I get so tired of walking about by myself, and do so want some nice long walks before going home. A young lady is staying here, but she is unhappy and will not go out with me. I shall expect you with all my heart. Your loving ROSE."

He decided to go instantly, would feel glad of the change.

That "young lady, unhappy," lingered in his mind afterward. Curious, Mrs. Vincent had said, "We are quite alone;" it looked very like ignoring the other inmate of the Cottage. The Minister had not been overimpressed by the genuineness of the lady at his first acquaintance; this, however, would not weigh in the balance if inclination prompted going.

It seemed another land by the white wintry view as the train approached Seaborough. A somewhat bare and bleak landscape, proving how incontestably the color and charm of the summer are needed to shed beauty upon the quieter English tracts. Mrs. Vincent greeted her distinguished guest with the warmest of welcomes, and the Minister thought she improved upon acquaintance. His little friend, remaining half shyly in the background, yet bursting to spring forward, was all reserve until the lady had retired to her domestic arrangements; she then went up to him with her exquisite caressing manner, and thanked him with simplicity and genuine sincerity for coming to see them.

"But what about the young lady, Rose? I thought at first you were alone."

"Such a sweet young lady, but so sad! I can't think why. Mrs. Vincent is not unkind to her. I fancy she is a boarder here, and yet Mrs. Vincent wouldn't be likely to do any thing of that sort, being very well off, would she? Do you know," Rose was very serious now, "there is something strange about it, for Mrs. Vincent seems to me to be always doing all she can to set the young lady against her guardian, a Mr. St. Aubyn, and yet he placed her here—as I understand it."

Little Rose had said her say and looked considerably perplexed, but her confidence in her friend assured her that he would, if he could, explain away all the perplexity. And the Minister was disturbed. He remembered the name, St. Aubyn, very well, and recalled Lord Ellerby's narration of the facts connected with the flight of the lovely wanderer. So he asked, "Can you tell me what day this young lady came here?" She told him; he compared dates, found it the day following that of the young lady's departure from the artist's woodland home, and said, "I should like to see her."

"She is always in her room, sits at the window, and doesn't care to talk with any one but her servant."

"Her servant!" cried the Minister, with astonishment and pleasure; "a servant brought with her?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Vincent does not half like it, I think. She is very short with her, and the servant is the same with Mrs. Vincent."

"All this is singular," mused the Minister; "but I suppose I shall get to the bottom of it."

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When Martha Saxe, upon leaving the presence of Mr. St. Aubyn, on the eventful night of their return, had gone up stairs to the chamber of her young mistress, she found that perverse but troubled beauty sobbing hysterically. This of all things struck a responsive chord, and Martha joined her, but found time to console her nevertheless, and told her she was certain all would be well in the morning; the master would sleep on it, and receive her forgivingly when calmer. This had the effect of procuring a night's rest for the child, broken, disturbed, uneasy, fitful, but better than no rest at all, and the good woman herself watched and slept, and slept and watched the night through in a chair beside the bed.

The first thing in the morning Mrs. Vincent went to her future charge, and found her dressed and waiting for the call to breakfast, eyes red, cheeks flushed, brow aching. She introduced herself as a very old friend of Mr. St. Aubyn's, the friend of many years' standing; and this dear girl, whom she would love so fondly, was to come and stay with her a while; she had a pretty residence, and would make her so happy and comfortable; and, she delicately added, this was Mr. St. Aubyn's own wish and arrangement.

Then Lena, supporting herself by resting a little hand upon the dressing-table, looked St. Aubyn's friend in the face, not defiantly, but without fear, and said, "I refuse to go with you. I don't know you, and I don't wish to. You are nothing to me. I will go to him; if he will not receive me—"

"He will not receive you. Mr. St. Aubyn has issued orders that he is not to be disturbed."

"Miss St. Aubyn issues orders here also, madam, or did, and it will not be from a stranger she will submit to be dictated to in this house."

Lena rung the bell with spirit, the elegant widow waiting the result with unmoved grace and sweetness.

"Will you ask papa to come to me, or say I will go to him?"

She spoke hurriedly and feverishly, and the domestic was affected, delivering her message with pathetic earnestness, and returning slowly with this reply—

"My master wishes me to say he is unwell this morning, and hopes you will excuse him for not seeing you. He has arranged matters with Mrs. Vincent, who will explain every thing to you, miss."

"Will you be good enough to go and tell papa I have heard this lady's explanation, and am not satisfied with it, and certainly shall not go away with her? You can tell papa, please, I very much prefer returning to where I came from yesterday."

Mrs. Vincent saw in this the advancement of her own deep scheme, except in the event of St. Aubyn relaxing. No; she knew the suffering nature too well. Lena's reply would only add fuel to the fire.

The answer was transmitted—that Miss Lena was quite at liberty to act as she thought proper. The child melted then, her high spirits vanished before his icy indifference, and she wept bitterly. She knew now how passionately she had been loved, was still loved. Passive, utter, unrepining obedience would alone court, as time might bring about, the forgiveness she felt any penance would cheaply buy. She held out her hand to St. Aubyn's friend. "He wishes it; I will go with you. I am sorry I spoke rudely to you."

And the friend kissed her upon the brow, with—

"Good child! This will please him so much. Come, now, let's get your things together quietly, and we'll go on to my pretty home, dear, without further trouble to poor papa."

She cried again at that; she could fancy him shut in that lonely room, as none else could fancy it; saw him after she had gone, conceived the agony following; but she could be so true to him away there, could prove her past innocence by her scrupulous conduct in the future. It was a heart-breaking business, turning out all her odds and ends of apparel and adornment—lace trifles she had worn for his pleasure, ribbons that became the blush-roses upon her cheeks and the sheaf of lustrous hair his fingers would no more idle with. Her dresses were many as the months, she would only take the plainest. All was in order for packing. The dainty widow would not aid at the disagreeable office; the child had not the heart to summon the servant to help her; the slender and fragile hands were listless at the task, when Martha Saxe entered from breakfast and the kitchen's criticism of events.

"Never mind them, Miss Lena; I'll put our things together, and good riddance, say I!"

The girl looked up astonished, but with wonderful joy in her eyes.

"I mean that you are not going from here without me, miss; we've stuck together so long, and will do so to the end of the chapter, please God."

"This is a very great liberty, I think," said the widow, with the utmost composure.

"It's what we call French leave, ma'am, which in this case is better than no leave at all; but if it's more satisfactory to you, Mr. St. Aubyn's leave can be had likewise."

"Well, it will be much more satisfactory," replied Mrs. Vincent, thinking the application to that gentleman would settle it very differently.

Mrs. Saxe quitted the room. She betook herself to the sanctum of the master, and was admitted. With sorrow she witnessed the ravages of the struggle he had gone through; the equal friend of both, she felt deeply for this sensitive and stricken man, although, of course, not understanding as Lena understood all the super-delicacy of his suffering. He received her visit with pleasure, thinking well of the worthy soul whose devotion was idyllic in its unselfishness.

"I hope you won't feel offended, Sir, if I make bold to ask for granting of the request now, which I was to have, you said last night, whenever I put it to you."

"Certainly, Mrs. Saxe, I will keep my word, pledged to you in my gratitude, and insufficient, in my opinion, whatever it may be, to reward the service you have rendered."

"It is that you will allow me to go with my dear young lady, wherever she is going, there to remain so long as her unsuspecting sin against you is unforgiven? Man is harder as well as more foolish than Providence, I reckon."

The words were as knives; but her request pleased him more than he would reveal.

"Yes, you can accompany her, and—and"—his voice trembled over this—"send me a line now and then, telling me of—of your welfare. Never mind the writing, Mrs. Saxe," for he saw her hesitate; "I shall not look at that."

He had mistaken her hesitation. She would write without fear; had taken care to learn that useful art, long, long ago, before the needle-work, or the washing, or the baking.

"I was just thinking, begging your pardon, Sir, that if so be as you would care to hear of our young lady, won't it be better not to let her go at all?"

He arose at that, stern and unyielding, in one of those susceptible moods when a hair turns the scale, and fearing the permission would be in jeopardy, she thought it prudent to ask for a line to Mrs. Vincent, authorizing her attendance upon the young lady; and St. Aubyn wrote this at once, Martha bearing to that lady the mandate.

"Martha Saxe, attached servant, will go with Lena, as maid. This will be an advantageous arrangement. L."

"I don't know," said the widow, curtly to herself, viewing the intrusion with strong distaste. But so it was to be, and it thus came about that Lena's banishment was rendered just bearable.

The policy adopted by the widow was to fan and increase St. Aubyn's jealous displeasure by all means in her power, which were not slight, especially by cunningly framed letters, and to lead Lena, if she anyhow could do so, to think unlovingly and with aversion of him, having "cast her off!" as Mrs. Vincent said, and emphasized with a degree of soft and subtle apparent dissatisfaction at St. Aubyn's conduct, which could not but produce an impression.

* * * * * *

And that evening, writing to St. Aubyn, the widow said—

"I know you will sympathize with me, aware, as you are, of the resources of my poor house, when I tell you I have been surprised by a visit from the fascinating Minister, the literary Bayard you heard me speak of. I very much fear I shall have to report to you that the motive is in connection with the Manor: one of his first questions concerned the health of her ladyship. I shall be so grieved if this is the case, but will write you again in the course of a day or two, and meantime will keep my eyes open in your interests. I will endeavor to prevent his seeing Lena, if possible, but he is an awful character to keep under, if there is a pretty girl about."

This devilish epistle found him prostrate enough; it well-nigh finished him. Yet it is odd how the heart clings with despairing tenacity to straws! She was only surmising; she had not really noticed any thing; there were no grounds for her suspicions, and she might be mistaken. Was he not a minister of the Gospel? could such a one err thus criminally? Well, it was long since he had read newspapers, but he remembered hearing aforetime that instances had been of the minister proving all too human; but he hoped on, as we do, with that melancholy and yearning which must be so pathetic in the sight of Heaven. And then arrived another letter—

"My worst fears are realized; he has visited Lady Helen each day; and as though this were not enough, has forced himself upon Lena, and in spite of all my efforts to prevent it they are continually in each other's company. Can I tell you the extent to which I sympathize with you? But bear up; be strong; you, we, will conquer yet. Will write again soon."

The result of this was to perfect the poisonous work, when the bitterness seemed indeed to have reached its utmost height.

Still, it was all true, quite true, this black charge. Mr. Garland *had* visited Helen each day, *had* forced himself upon Lena, and they *were* continually in each other's company. Very dreadful, by Mrs. Vincent's ghastly showing, but that was not the Minister's view of the matter.

Finding Lena would not come down, and correctly divining the cause, Mr. Garland sent a kind message by Rose to say that he was a clergyman, and should be happy to have a little quiet talk with her.

True to her programme of perfect faithfulness, Lena returned a civil excuse, although in her heart feeling that if she could confide all to this would-be friend, what a relief it would afford to her.

The Minister wrote a line or two the next day and gave it to Martha Saxe, for he felt, instinctively, that she was trustworthy. Mrs. Vincent was away shopping when the Minister's messenger delivered this note to the solitary child he would befriend.

"Do not fear to see me; I have a loved daughter of my own, who may even now sadly need a friend. If you are troubled and sorrowing I may help you."

"And a very kind-spoken one he is, my dear; and if I were you I'd just tell him the story from beginning to end."

"Do you think so, Martha? Dare I? What a little wretch he will pronounce me!"

"Chance that; deal truthfully with him, and leave the rest."

"And you advise it?"

"I do. Worse can't come of it, better may. Shall I go and tell him to come up stairs?"

"Good gracious, no! What would Mrs. Vincent make of it? I will go down to him."

And she did so, and met him with the prettiest expression her always pretty face had ever worn, partly sad, partly sorry, half glad, half timid, and pouting with a little rebellious curve, as though anticipating being called to account.

But he took her hand so gently and unofficially, and with so easy an air, as if they had been known to one another a long time, that she felt at rest immediately.

And he upon his side was much impressed by her youthful beauty. Truly had Lord Ellerby presented a life-like copy.

"To make the most of our time, Miss Lena (you see I am not the stranger you took me for), tell me if I am right in supposing you quitted Lord Ellerby's to return to Mr. St. Aubyn's, and that gentleman, displeased by your mistaken freak, refused to accept the penitence you would have tendered; is it not so?"

"It is true," replied Lena, flushing with pain, and much surprised at the whole story being known or guessed by this calm, kind stranger.

"It proves a great love, Miss Lena, to cast the object loved from it as in this case."

"I know it. I can not tell you how much he loved me—"

"And still loves you. I do not need to be told. It is an unfortunate occurrence, sad for both, extremely difficult to re-adjust. As soon as my engagements permit of it, I will go on to the north and see Mr. St. Aubyn."

Lena shook her head. "The journey will be unavailing."

"If men were deterred by such fears, there would never be any good done except beneath the shadow of their own chimneys. But you will tell me exactly *all* that befell you while away. I can not say I hold with confession to the priest in the general way, but in this instance it is commendable. Do not be afraid to tell me any thing; I pledge you my word not to repeat any portion of the story you wish me to keep to myself."

She told him every thing, as he believed, with frank truthfulness.

Then he placed a hand upon each shoulder, and looking down into the clear eyes, he said, "Thank you, for honesty at least. Our friend need never fear while his little girl remains thus candid. Make yourself contented; I will help you." And he sent her back to the chamber lighter-hearted.

"I hope you won't go home until after the fair." Thus Rose, who expected much enjoyment of this annual holiday-making, of which she had often heard glowing accounts.

"You wish me to take you to it?" Rose nodded.

"It is held here on the Green, and the shows, I suppose, are splendid."

"Are they, indeed? I don't think it will be quite the place for either of us. You must go back with me instead, and I will take you somewhere in London."

Rose thought she would prefer the fair, and said so.

"Promise me you will just take me round, at all events, to look at the pretty things."

"Well, there may be no great harm in that. Perhaps I will."

It made the child happy, therefore the Minister was content.

In the afternoon he paid his respects to Lady Lindon. The Manor-house now presented a very different appearance to what it did upon the Minister's first acquaintance. Its sumptuous fittings and magnificent furniture rather startled this man of simple tastes. Surrounded by a court-like retinue, difficult of approach as some sovereign, rarely seen by the gossips, who knew but by hearsay of her haughty isolation, Lady Helen here enjoyed a privacy she had not sought in Brighton, where, indeed, she endeavored to dispel care by participating in the usual round of time-killing engagements, in which society expends the better half of its hours. None of it had banished the memory of him believed lost, who now seemed from this far-away aspect so noble and good. "Why did I not see it *then!*" was the endless lament in her saddened heart. United with this was the memory of her children. "Were one or both of these recovered, I should have something then to live for." The Minister's call was an agreeable surprise.

"I did not suppose I should have the pleasure of seeing you of all people. I am very glad!"

"Thank you. Presuming upon a brief acquaintance with Mrs. Vincent, who is entertaining a little friend of mine, I obtained leave of absence of my kind helpers, and stole off for a few days. I came here in the summer, and was greatly taken with the pleasant walks about."

"It will be a rest for you."

"Not altogether. Even here I have open to me a duty of some embarrassment, which, however, I may not neglect. It matters little where my path lies, I am sure to find some one in need of a friend with a thinking head, a feeling heart, a helping hand."

"You are very self-denying and good," murmured Lady Lindon. "Some one of our cottagers, I suppose? The class is always ready at narrating woes and crosses in a kindly disposed ear."

"It is as well, if it gain them sympathy. But it is in the house of my hostess this time. A young lady boarder placed there by her mortally displeased guardian, in consequence of the said young lady having quitted her home during his absence, gone to London, and met with the shelter offered by a good-natured, thoughtless artist friend of ours. This is, in fact, one of the innocent causes of poor Lady Flora's distress of mind. Odd, how things come round, is it not?"

"Yes. But how comes she here, of all places?"

"Mrs. Vincent is a friend of her guardian's, and was in the house at the time of her return. Naturally he consigned her for a season to the care of this friend."

"And she could not be in worse or more treacherous hands."

"You know Mrs. Vincent?"

"I used to. She brought about all my trouble. Had it not been for her— But there, it is useless recurring to that time. What are you going to do for this miserable little sinner?"

"Reconcile them, and restore her, of course."

"I wish you joy of your task!"

"I do not look to tasks for joy—that will come afterward."

The Minister retired, and was seen proceeding from the Manor to the Cottage by, to compute mildly, half a hundred eyes.

Mrs. Tapper, from her station in the bar of the Lindon Arms, saw, speculated, worked it out with a piece of thought in her mind, and by aid of multiplication balanced it to her satisfaction. Mrs. Wallis, of the iron store, was, as she said, riveted by sight of that figure walking from the large gate, along the roadway bordering the Green, and in at the Cottage of the widow. Mrs. Rice saw, and said she had an idea something more than usual was going on; Mrs. Rice knew the stranger's name by his letters passing through her office. All the village and village street were exercised in consequence, and proud Lady Lindon's name was in every one's mouth. They had so waited for something to talk about, and now they had got it, and made admirable use of it. The fish-monger, Smelt, was driving his cart on the other side of the Green, and happening to turn at the time, saw it likewise, and Smelt's cart became for the nonce important as the Royal Mail. Uriah Sticky, the grocer, who supplied Mrs. Rice wholesale, was on his way thither with samples, and Uriah Sticky saw, and moaned, for the harlot spoken of in the book of Revelation had direct reference, he believed, without any prejudice, to Lady Lindon, who bought her groceries from London. And Vault, the stone-mason, just coming from the church, also saw; Lady Lindon, he had been told, wore mourning for his lordship, and Vault was heard to remark there was more plaster of Paris than quarry polish about, and this was considered a very dark saying; was regarded as occult, not being understood, the mason being looked upon with especial awe, as to some extent in open account with the church-yard.

Mr. Garland was also seen by Major and Mrs. Howard, who were even then driving up to the Cottage. Mrs. Major Howard alighted with great ceremony; the stranger might be looking; the stranger was looking!

Mrs. Major Howard marched majestically up the garden path, leaning upon the Major's arm, and followed by the spruce tiger, bearing the military rug; for it looked like snow again.

"Good-morning!" said the Major to the party, with his customary salutation. "Good-morning; out for a little drive; hadn't seen you since in church on Sunday. My wife said, 'We will call on our friend;' I was very pleased; but bless my soul, I beg your pardon; you have company; no idea any one was here! Mrs. Howard, our friend has guests; we will retire. Here, boy, take the rug back!"

"Not at all," remonstrated the polite widow; "allow me to introduce you? Mr. Garland, of Brighton—Major and Mrs. Howard!"

Major and Mrs. Howard could not have deported themselves with more elaborate finish had they been at court.

"This is indeed an honor," said the Major, in a low voice, but sufficiently loud for the person interested to hear.

"Major," put in Mrs. Howard, with feeling, "I always told you I believed we should one day see Mr. Garland; it has long been the ambition of my life!" (half to the Minister, who, with Rose by his side, was turning over a portfolio of Mrs. Vincent's sketches.)

"My dear," replied the Major, a shade of reproach in his voice, "when in the army I was well disciplined to believe nothing certain until accomplished; to-day I can congratulate you, my dear, upon the realization of your favorite prophecy!" and, hand on heart, the Major bowed with precise etiquette to his lady.

The Minister found some difficulty in preserving his gravity. This was a new type of being, and Rose was an awkward companion; her expressive eyes were flashing with merriment.

"Let me take your bonnet, dear; you will stay tea with us?" Mrs. Vincent stood waiting, the Major's lady hesitated; then she said, playfully, "Well, I don't know, really! I must ask the Major."

"Afraid we're intruding," said that gentleman, with gallantry; then, looking full at the Minister, "but there, I really don't think I *can* refuse to-day."

Mrs. Howard crossed over to Rose. "Won't you give me a kiss, my dear? Ah! I thought you would; and now tell me, how is mamma?" While thus favoring the child with her attention, the Major's lady contrived to shake back a profusion of real lace around her open sleeve, for the purpose, possibly, of dazzling the Minister by her white arm, whereon rested an imitation gold bracelet. Then veering round with august effect, and waving the hand belonging to the said arm toward Mrs. Vincent, which sent the sleeve up to the elbow (for she remarked that he had not been looking during the preliminary by-play), the lady drew Mrs. Vincent's attention to the exquisite moulding of the little girl's forehead. "She will be a great musician, Anna! You are fond of music, my dear, I can see."

"No, ma'am, I don't like it at all."

The Major marched to the scene of action, and described the brow with finger and thumb, turning to his wife reprovingly. "My dear, you were in error; these organs indicate intellect. Do you remember the great Duke's forehead, my love?"

"Dear Duke!" murmured Mrs. Howard, with broken emotion, and using a deeply lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief. "Ah! what a friend we lost in him! I will go with you, dear," to Mrs. Vincent, and the two left the room.

Mr. Garland had never felt so uncomfortable as with this curious pair.

The Major stood erect and commanding, looking down upon this man of the Church, with the child and the sketches, and his gravely gentle manners, and all at once exclaimed, "Sir, you have consecrated your life to a noble cause. I used to think my profession an honorable one, but, Sir, yours is the mainspring of all human love and charity. I shall never forget last engagement I was in; poor fellow saved my life; quite a Christian, Sir. After his noble deed, by which he lost both arms and a leg, 'Let us return thanks,' he said, meaning that my life was spared to my country. When the Duke heard of it he gave orders, 'Bring that man before me, I will reward him.' He was not to be found. From that time I have felt unhappy; he might be in want. Imagine my surprise last week, poor beggar limped to the portico of my residence. Tabitha, my maid, about to give him some bread and cold meat and send him off, I recognized him by a scar: 'Stay!' I cried; 'it is he, by Mars!' and I pressed on to the vestibule, seized his hands in mine, and besought him to come in and rest!"

The Major paused, too affected by the vivid recollection of the pathetic meeting to remember that the man had no arms; paused, not to take breath, but to lower his voice to a confidential pitch, softly begging Rose to run and look out of the window. Complying, with a comical air, she left them for the window; then the Major continued, "I have tried to help him from my limited income: I have looked upon it in a brotherly light as due from one comrade to another, and I have represented the case to my friends, who have nobly responded, one with ten pounds, another with five, according to means and largeness of heart; 'freely ye have received, freely give!' We have much to be thankful for, Mr. Garland, in the blessings of peace; and when this poor fellow lost his legs for us, that our countrymen might live at home undisturbed by the enemy, such a contemplation is to me the sublime witness of our national completeness as a body. 'Devotion,' said the old Duke, 'is the backbone of the English character, and the unselfish giving of your all is the marrow of that devotion!' and when this poor, noble-hearted fellow, sightless, was led by that little dog right up to the very door-step of his old officer, it was almost more than I could bear; it was, indeed, Mr. Garland!"

The Minister was about to express commiseration at the pitiable condition that the man, armless, legless, and sightless, and led by the little dog, must have presented, when Mrs. Major Howard entered the room, and was rewarded by a savage look from her commandant. Despite having marred the Major's tactics, the Major's lady appeared truly resplendent, and as she sank upon a chair, striking out her toe to make her silk set effectively, she had all the mien of a lady of the first water.

"I was just telling Mr. Garland of the poor corporal's case, my dear, and remarking how much we ought to be thankful for!"

The lady had not heard of the poor corporal before, but quite understood the valiant Major's remark. She turned with a winning expression to the Minister.

"My dear husband is *so* tender-hearted, an inestimable trait in a military man, generally supposed to be a little callous, I believe; but the

Major was never *Jupiter tonans*, Mr. Garland; his *savoir-vivre* procured him the special commendation of the great Duke. I am even now using up the cuff of his undress regimentals for pen-wipers I am making to send to a bazar in Dublin. I don't know how your ladies find it, but I can not get materials enough for making up; and where there are so many calls one can not keep buying. Some of our friends are very good. 'Here, Mrs. Howard, lay this out for us to the best advantage.' It takes up a deal of time, but one ought not to study that in a good cause."

Dr. Hunter, the leading practitioner of Seaborough, was seen walking up the garden path. Of course none but the leading man would have been able to advise upon the imaginary ailments to which Mrs. Major Howard, following fashionable precedent, was constitutionally subject. The Major entertained the same objection to settling accounts with medical men as with other folks, and from the same motives. Dr. Hunter never had been settled with; there was a seven years' account for fees and medicines waiting to be arranged for. If the doctor casually alluded to it, the Major would say, in an off-hand manner, that his friends Jenner and Ferguson had never sent him in a bill in their lives. It was perfectly true, they never had. In this case the doctor cured much upon the principle his patient recovered—by faith. Still, the Major conscientiously avoided the gentleman, and when he was seen approaching, the Major arose, remarking that he must be going. "I never can consent to meet those fellows; ever since the surgeon attached to our ambulance insulted me, my antipathy has been extreme. This man Hunter is very clever; very clever, I believe, but I do not like him; he is one of the persons I admire most at a distance. I am sure you will excuse me retiring to another room until Æsculapius has gone?"

Dr. Hunter had been told of the extraordinary event, how that the clerical friend of the mysterious widow had been seen leaving the Manor-house, and Dr. Hunter, who of necessity knew the Minister by reputation, was extremely interested. Any incident calculated to stir things a little interested Dr. Hunter, who would have thought it an improvement upon existing stagnation had Lady Lindon been visited by all the clergymen in Christendom; indeed, the doctor once said to Vault, in reference to the church-yard, "It is hardly worth keeping it inclosed for its purpose. Better turn it over to the graziers; people hereabout think a good deal more of mutton than of physic, and as for the ground, it don't pay a percentage!" But this new-comer was decidedly looking ill, in fact, seemed worn out by work or anxiety, and his pale face was in decided contrast to the ruddy countenances of the Sleperton and Seaborough men and women, living between the splendid sea one way and the odorous country the other. Dr. Hunter devoutly hoped that the distinguished stranger hadn't come for nothing; it would be some compensation to read in one of the select journals to which he, as an educated man, subscribed so regularly, and received by post direct from the office, "We regret to learn that the Rev. Westley Garland, during his visit to Seaborough for a few days' rest, has been taken suddenly ill. He is, we understand, progressing satisfactorily in the skilled hands of Dr. Hunter." It pleased the doctor, and he thought, "I'll go and look him up, see how he holds; shall tell in a minute if he is likely to be down." And he did so. He had not seen him close before, and looked with the true audacious scrutiny of the privileged medical man. He found the Minister decidedly pale, certainly care-worn, emphatically harassed, but, as he put it to himself with keen disgust, "hearty as a buck!" And the doctor felt disheartened. "It is astonishing how some of these studious men do last out; I declare they're just like leather!" Thinking which the doctor seated himself for a few minutes' sociable conversation.

"Have you heard from your son lately?" To the widow, who, with graceful warmth, replied, "This very morning."

"Mr. Lorry is a good judge; it is rather bleak here just now. You find this place try you after the genial air of Brighton, Sir?"

"Not at all; I think it several degrees warmer."

"Well, upon my word, I never heard that opinion before; you astonish me!"

"As a rule, Sir, local men are too interested to express their candid opinions."

"Oh, Mr. Garland!" cried the widow, coquettishly, "how naughty of you to be so hard upon your sex!"

"It is quite unintentional, my dear madam; I simply report the result of commonplace observation. I imagine this to be a very healthy and salubrious part of the country."

"Oh yes," said the doctor, glumly, "the people haven't much to complain of; yet the farmer grumbles, and the tradesman laments the badness of the times, but so, I suppose, they have from time immemorial. Things can't be so bad since they're all engaged at testimonial-making." This the doctor uttered as though contemning equally the object and the promoters, but with a shadow of interest, as though he would have no objection to become the bearer of any donation toward the purpose in view if the Minister might feel disposed to favor him therewith. Mr. Garland was gradually experiencing that even the rural Elysium is not exempt from its principles of greed.

"I have heard something of this," said Mrs. Vincent. "What is it all about?"

"Well, it is found necessary, for some inscrutable reason, to present Mr. Elsynge of Froggypond with a testimonial, and all well-to-do people are called upon to subscribe."

"They have not been to me yet," replied the widow, with an air of resignation. "How is the eccentric mistress of Froggypond?"

"Thank you, the old lady continues very hearty." Dr. Hunter had been physician-in-chief to the Elsynge family for a very long time, but as neither the lady nor her grandson had ever ailed any thing, the appointment was a sinecure.

"Mr. Elmore will come into considerable property there; not much need for a testimonial, I should think."

"It appears exceedingly doubtful, madam, whether Mrs. Elsynge will make up her mind to depart this life before Mr. Elmore" (correcting himself); "that respected lady is happily possessed of a magnificent constitution."

The doctor departed; the Major and his lady returned to the room.

"Strong smell of drugs!" taking out the enamelled snuff-box. "Odd thing, but people are sure to drop in just as one is sitting down to tea. I think I heard mention of my friend Elsynge's testimonial. This box was a testimonial, Sir, presented me by the great Duke. 'Howard,' said he, 'accept it' (though I really didn't like to, knowing it to have been his constant companion), 'and think of me sometimes with esteem.' Here his eyes became dim; I lowered the colors, when he revived in an instant, grasped my hand, and murmured, 'The knowledge of your esteem and my Queen's approbation lightens this trial;' and so passed away." Mrs. Howard was heard to murmur, "Dear Duke!" in a voice of deep emotion. The Major handed the box to Mr. Garland, who justly admired and then returned it. Handsome of its kind, it had, years ago, been borrowed at Baden, and, in accordance with the Major's invariable policy, never returned. "Thus, you will understand," continued Major Howard, "the interest, the fraternal interest, I take in testimonials; and respecting, as I do, my old friend Elsynge, you will readily imagine I at once consented to form a branch subscription fund, and undertook the sole responsibility of the same, in order, my dear Sir, to ease these heavily tried business people, whose time is so valuable, to some extent of the onerous labor. I wrote to a friend of mine in the Grenadier Guards, 'Will you subscribe to the Elmore Elsynge testimonial?' He knew us both, no need for formal representation. No answer came. 'Not a mean fellow, I do hope!' thought I; then wrote again, 'Will you, or will you not join us? Handsome piece of plate, the Froggypond memorial.' Then came a check for ten guineas. I have several friends at a distance wishing to help; officially announced subscription list open at Alderman Gubbins, so it is. I prefer to hide my little light under a bushel, and to collect privately from the circle I immediately know toward this representative object. We should all do what little we can, Mr. Garland. Mrs. Howard said it was *infra dig.*; I thought otherwise; man should trample upon his prejudices. One day at mess our adjutant brought out dice. Now I hate all gambling and play, and lottery speculation is contrary to my principles, but I not only expressed no displeasure, but actually joined my subordinate in a quiet game, for the simple purpose of assisting him in a harmless recreation; an engagement was pending, and as it is half the battle to keep up the spirits of your men, he exclaimed, somewhat excitedly, as he shuffled the pack, 'I—'"

"Dice, Major," his lady quietly interposed; then aside to her friend, "Dear man, his memory is so bad!"

"Yes, my dear, I thank you. He was about to throw, when—"

Here the Major was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Vincent's servant with a card upon a tiny salver.

"Ah! my landlord, Mr. Elmore Elsynge. Show Mr. Elsynge into the drawing-room."

"My dear," said the Major, reproachfully, to his lady, "we quite forgot to write those letters. We must return at once, to save the evening post."

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CHAPTER XXXV.

AT SLEPERTON FAIR.

Sleperton Fair was looked forward to with much eagerness, and was the one event kept up annually with great spirit. Thereto went all the swains for miles around, each with his lass; the staid folk with their children. It was a wonderful gathering, was Sleperton Fair, and great was the jollity and merriment. Thither came all the shows and roundabouts that could anyhow get there. Wax-work exhibitions, wild-beast caravans, shooting galleries, swings, gingerbread, toy and toffy stalls, and sweet-stuff barrows. Booths were erected for sparring, wrestling, quoits, and eating and drinking. Upon that peaceful circle of green there met together the monstrosities and wonders native to the English fair, and a highly animated scene it was, especially at nine o'clock in the evening, when lighted up and swarming with the ruralites all agape at the marvels and scattering their money broadcast. They saved all the year for this, and then spent on principle. Three days the fair lasted, and during that time the hamlet was given over to revelry. Old English sports and new English sports ran their round with zest. Every year the site of honor was taken up by a circus, which the proprietors by prearrangement so determined that two should not journey there together, and that it should be a different one each fair time. To the left of this was a show of the Richardson type; to the right, but naturally covering more ground than the theatre, was Maneater's far-famed Royal Menagerie. Near the theatre would be found the celebrated Chinese manikins, next to which the Indian jugglers and serpent-charmers, and beyond the Indians, the court marionettes. Mrs. Maneater (Mr. Maneater had come to an untimely end in one of his lion-taming exploits) had for a neighbor the largest Punch and Judy travelling, next to which was the Asiatic giant, attended by the performing fleas, the hairless horse, and the entrancing Circassian beauty. As the outside music of each show was in rivalry, the din and clangor can be imagined. Sleperton Fair, indeed, made as much noise as it is possible for a fair to make, and if noise attracts people, as it seems to do, it was perfectly successful here. The trombones, saxhorns, euphonia, gongs, drums, cymbals, tambourines, and other instruments, went at it as though after this fair their opportunity for arousing a disturbance would be forever gone. At the top of the steps, beside the gilded dragon portals giving ingress to her unrivalled exhibition, sat the redoubtable Mrs. Maneater beating a drum and proclaiming with all the strength of her voice that the animals were just going to be fed; a process well known to work upon the public interest, and cunningly extended by feeding one animal at a time, which agreeable office fell to the lot of a brawny individual specially retained to groom the denizens of the desert. Mrs. Maneater was a lady of florid belongings. All her life long she had been connected with, and was as fond of, her savage tribe as though she were their mother. Of easy-going temper and kind heart, the well-to-do widow of the lion-tamer was a general favorite and upon good terms with the several branches of the exhibiting profession. Time after time she had phalanxed her vans beside the various travelling circuses; she knew all the proprietors and the members of the companies. If she arrived first and had camped, she would lend the brawny one to help the others to peg and build; if she arrived last, she received as readily many a lift from the strong-handed of the tent, who shunted her caravans and formed a caged quadrangle in no time. Mrs. Maneater sat at her drum, a tin treasury by her side, into which she poured the handfuls of sixpences from her apron while the crowd flocked in. There was no professor to discourse natural history in exquisite English; Mrs. Maneater scorned such adventitious aids to popularity. She could neither read nor write, and did not agree with making her patrons wise. "Give it 'em in the rough," said Mrs. Maneater, "but give 'em the real thing. There's no deception about Maneater's; they can see for themselves and explain to one another." And her patrons did so, upon a system that might have astonished Buffon. Never once did Mrs. Maneater cast an envious eye upon the throng streaming into Ringdom and Tanner's amphitheatre, apparently swallowing up so many sight-seers. She knew they would come to her sooner or later, knew the rural taste for the marvellous to be insatiable, and where, thought the old lady with pride, would they look upon an exhibition containing more marvels than her world-famed menagerie! The performances in the circus were not lengthy at fair time, some twenty minutes or thereabouts, when "God save the Queen" played the ruddy audience out, to make room for another crowded circle of approving spectators.

It was the first night of the fair, a clear fine night, when the gala seemed almost robbed of its offensiveness by the calm serene sky above, moon-lit and starry. Every body was there, even the farmers' young sons and many visitors from Seaborough also, and it was a tempting night to walk about and see what was going on. Seen from the road leading straight from Old Seaborough it presented a haze of light and twinkle of lamps. The braying of trumpets could be heard, and the hum of the business doing. Getting nearer, the clash of the instruments, the cluttering of drums, and blasts of the trumpets came out shrill upon the ear. All around the Green the cottagers kept open house and welcomed their friends who had come to see the fair. Little children, sent up to bed to get them out of the way, stood with their faces pressed to the diamond panes of the small windows and watched wistfully, as such do, until their toes were cramped and they looked through a breath-bedewed tracery at the distant cluster of lights.

"Walter" had not betrayed the emotion she experienced upon finding they were bound for Sleperton, connected with which were her happiest reflections. If she could but contrive to inform Lorry of her being so near him and again in such hated thralldom, she felt sure he would do something to help her. But he might not be at home, and she was so sharply looked after now, truly there seemed insurmountable difficulty in the way. And then the time was so short, they would be off again directly for quite another part of England. She cast yearning glances toward that grand old house, endeared by the knowledge of her parentage, and to that pretty cottage home of her loved boy friend. Little she imagined, when thinking of that bright and beauteous girl who had broken upon her memory like a glimpse of sunshine, that the sister, as she loved to think of her, was at that moment in the cottage toward which she looked so wistfully. Little (and this was more strange than all) did she think that in yonder stately dwelling-house her mother sat with blinds and curtains drawn to veil the low display from her fastidious, much-disgusted vision. How well she remembered her toiling progress along the village street that evening when first she came to Sleperton, the kind old man who had addressed her while she watched the lessening glow of the sunset upon the houses, where she had first been told of the old place!

With vindictive satisfaction Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner had compelled her to go through all the old graceful acts that had so often brought down thunders of applause. Whether it was the contrast of the pretty child with her steed, or the natural beauty she possessed, or the elegance of her movements, or that almost defiant and desperate daring, lending *esprit* to her performance, certain it is she had from the first been a great favorite. No longer was she disguised in boy's apparel; the proprietors altered that very quickly. It was in the light and attractive garb of the child of the arena; a low muslin dress, crisp skirts that fluttered round her, and a scarf floating to the gentle current while the horse pranced the circle. Although so simply adorned, a piece of velvet round the throat, and a small cluster of flowers upon the bosom, eager eyes followed her, so interesting was the picture. At night, between the performances, she was required to appear on the stage erected in front of the establishment, and divided midway to give admission to the spectators passing into the circus; upon one side this child with other members of the company danced; upon the other, the buffoons, acrobats, and that India rubber genius, Boneless Joey of Japan, disported themselves in various antics vastly attractive to the rustic crowd outside.

Mixing with the crowd freely as though one of them, after his usual manner, Mr. Garland was arrested before the circus by the sight of that child dancing for the coarse enjoyment of those assembled, and it was such a sad and at the same time such a beautiful spectacle that he was absorbed by it and lost in thought. Gradually it dawned upon him—that resemblance to Lena of the dainty face upon the canvas. He had not heard all the story known to us, but he was sure the child before him was the original of the painting, and he made up his mind to see and question her. It would be a task of difficulty, no doubt, but Westley Garland was wise in his generation and resorted to diplomacy. After the crowd had scattered, and many from far-off hamlets had set out homeward in companies along the dark road, enlivening the way with roistering song; after the lights in the tented building were extinguished—save where grooms with lanterns attended to the provender of the animals; after the members of the company were gone to their respective lodgings and taverns, and Jimmy Ringdom, Esq., with Mrs. Ringdom—greatly fatigued by the exertion consequent upon money-taking at the pigeon-hole pay-box on the stage, and the co-proprietor Billy Tanner, Esq., with Mrs. Tanner—much wearied and very thirsty after energetic trick acts with the highly trained steed Pegasus, had resorted to the *Lindon Arms;* after the flaring oil lamps and torches scattered throughout the fair were all darkened, save only a glimmer here and there where some of the dusk-skinned stowed away the remainder such as ginger-bread, jewelry, nuts, toys, ornaments, china and glass, cheap prints, fruit, and other things, while a thick haze hovered above the place and unwholesome scents struggled with the sweet air; then the Minister moved silently among the stalls, and threaded his way around the booths, passed behind the shows, and skirted the big tent of horsemanship, arriving at the point of his destination, which was the famous Maneater's, just as the brawny helper was hanging tarpaulin over the gilt and glass splendor portaling the entrance. Just within, the formidable but not unkindly looking mistress was counting her receipts. The stranger waited until she had finished, not to put her out in her calculation, neither did she desist because he was there waiting; but when all was balanced and tied with string in little canvas bags, she said brusquely, without looking up, "Well, my man, what do you want?" To which the man, with civil respect, replied, "Small coin in exchange for sovereigns or notes;" and the mother of lions and leopards was glad. It was one of the difficulties she labored under, converting small change into large in rural districts, it being impossible for the one hostelry of importance to accommodate all the public entertainers, and the nearest town often being too far off to admit of a purpose journey. Thus the mother of lions and leopards was glad, and the transaction was conducted to their mutual satisfaction. Then the obliging stranger requested permission to see a few of the animals on the quiet, and Mrs. Maneater, who was pardonably proud of the condition of her menagerie, herself conducted him down the steps into the inclosed well-trodden area, with its barred walls and the curious odor inseparable from a collection of wild beasts. The mistress held a stable lantern aloft with a muscular arm and a clinched fist that would have laid any of those crouching, fiercely peering ones low at her feet were there any necessity; but, as a rule, they gave little trouble, she said, and, with exception of that occasion when the bold Maneater was partaken of, had caused no sorrow. It was a weird scene by that one light, showing the Minister the shadowy inmates of the caravans; a ludicrous scene at times, as, for instance, when standing before the lions she explained, "There used to be a Dan'el, but I can't abide trickery, an' it made it too like the wax-work affair! I'se allus dealt fair with the public, and they's dealt fair with me. I never labelled porkepine as armadilley, nor painted giraffs and helefants on the outside when the show wouldn't hold 'em; and I never had a bad sixpence offered me since travelling—many a thin un but never a bad un—and that I calls dealing fair wi' one another."

"Most certainly, Mrs. Maneater," said the Minister, with cordial approval. Then, "By-the-way, what becomes of the female portion of the circus people after business?" She looked up with quick suspicion; such is aroused by a slight remark, where, as in this instance, the daily life is a running tilt with insult, the nightly experience one incessant scene of vice. The Minister immediately unbuttoned his coat, and the badge of his calling, the square-cut vest and white neck-cloth, re-assured the woman.

"I feel I can deal honestly with you, Mrs. Maneater, because you are an honest woman. I have an interest in a young girl, the youngest there."

"So have I. Allus have done," said the woman, with refreshing renewed candor. The voice of this man talking with her, so sadly tender, his kind face so lined with trouble, were inviting to confidence, and she even added, "I've allus thought her out o' place there, not but what they're nice people enough, but somehow she seems different to the usual girls." The remark was the more strange, since it is an uncommon thing for one of these travelling exhibitors to volunteer any opinion upon their neighbors. "I've watched her for long," continued Mrs. Maneater, "and a'most with affection, though I say it; an' when, some weeks ago, she ran away from 'em, I felt a kinder glad of it, for many's the time she's said to me she wished she could run away, or else lay down an' die! Now to a young gal feeling that ways it's a hard life, it is! But I've shown her what little kindness I could, and allus will when it happens we are pitched one agen another."

"And very good of you, ma'am; you will receive your reward for every kind word and deed. I half suspected it; that's why I came to you to-night."

The woman courtesied. She was of rough manners, but her deference and gratitude for his confidence were in themselves graceful. "I thanks you, Sir, for your good opinion. I've allus done my duty by all, and never showed a bird or a beast till paid for. Mr. Cross, o' Liverpool, knows us and will tell you we're honest folk."

"I'm sure of it. Where can I see and speak with the girl now?"

"Here; I'll bring her to you. She trusts me, and knows I wouldn't lead her wrong."

"Poor child, to need such caution!" The woman shrugged her shoulders and went up the steps with heavy tread, leaving the lantern on the topmost, its dim light making the place look ghastly. The growling of the animals and measured pacing of those disturbed lent additional gloom; low down between the bars fierce eyes glared upon the intruder; without were the signs of unrest indicative of a camp of wanderers. The friendly woman returned shortly in company with the girl. Mr. Garland took the little hand so kindly, and asked her,

"I think you are the young lady my friend Lord Ellerby entertained in company with another?"

"Yes, Sir," trembling with joy; "I was searching for her when I was seen and brought back to the circus from which I had escaped."

"I supposed so. Very well; now you want me to help you?"

In reply the child asked, "Do you know to whom the Manor-house here belonged?"

"To Lord Lindon."

"Yes; I am his daughter," she said, quietly, and with dignity. "Such is my birth, it is quite true; and fatherless, motherless, I have been, and am, the common drudge of a common circus."

"This is very sad. Thank God, it is in my power to alter it! Fear not, your troubles are well-nigh over; keep your own counsel, and hope on a little longer. I know well how you have suffered; take comfort in my assurance that your suffering is almost at an end. I must see these people you are with. I doubt not there will be some difficulty in persuading or compelling them to cancel the agreement binding you to them; but do not fear, it shall be done, and you will be restored to your mother."

"To my mother!" repeated the child, with rapt and awe-struck interest and eagerness.

"To your mother; but have patience. I am obliged to take a journey to the north to-morrow to keep an important engagement made with one of whom you will know more; but I shall not lose sight of your interests, and speedily return."

She fell upon her knees before him, and, clasping his hand, kissed it repeatedly, while the grateful tears fell quickly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

QUALIFYING FOR THE BAR.

Between Trinity and Michaelmas terms, William Arden had certainly enjoyed an easy time of it, in a pleasant saunter here and there, and yachting off the coast, during which delightful occupation befell that romantic adventure which gained him access to the Boarded House; and from that time he experienced a change in his lazy quest of pleasure, and more profitable seasons of study, to which he returned bearing with him an exceedingly tender recollection of one dainty little face, which somehow he always thought of in connection with fallen fruit upon the grass. The twenty-four November days of the term were devoted to assidious study; there seemed something more in the world than there had been, and Willie bestowed, perhaps, more serious thought than ever before upon the future. He was well provided for, had a hopeful prospect before him, was naturally of a very affectionate disposition, held tenaciously to strong principles of honor, possessed innate refinement, and felt highly elated, as he said to himself one morning, while flourishing a razor before his glass with much self-complacency at the comeliness of his visage, "and I think I shall make a girl as good a husband as most fellows." While exposing this pardonable piece of self-complacency, and corroborating the opinion thus arrived at, we must acknowledge also that against these were points not so prepossessing, and of which young ladies think much. Thus Mr. Arden was in no sense a brilliant person; but as the essentially brilliant persons are seldom very amiable, and are almost always eaten up by vanity, this may not count to his prejudice. Next he was not a wit—another drawback. Ladies are choice as to the water of their diamonds, worn with so great a measure of pride; but if not a wit, he was exceedingly thoughtful, which with some few rare spirits more than atones for the absence of the distinguished trait. The term closed, and Willie visited relatives in town, returning home in December, when Yorkshire, to say the least of it, presents a forcible contrast to London. There were five good weeks before the commencement of Hilary, and all Willie could think of was living those five weeks through with the hope of seeing his fair querist, whose thirst for knowledge, or rather enlightenment, had so posed this gentleman qualifying for the bar.

Naturally his first question, upon sitting quietly down to talk the news over, was of his father's friend and daughter. He was concerned to see the old pastor look troubled at the inquiry, and guessed instantly that something was amiss; and Mr. Arden told his son of Lena's going away—to Willie's intense disgust and annoyance—and of Mr. St. Aubyn's poignant distress of mind in consequence; also of the girl's return, of St. Aubyn's refusal to receive her, and of her going away with a Mrs. Vincent, who had been staying at the House. And Master Willie was surprised, as well he might be, and condemned St. Aubyn's harshness, as he called it, in no measured terms.

"This will be a sudden change for Lena. I hope the lady she is with will prove a really kind friend."

"St. Aubyn speaks highly of her."

"He spoke highly of the other woman, yet would have been better without her valuable services."

"I never liked her."

"Nor I; she led me a pretty chase, or would have done. Where does this Mrs. Vincent live?"

"At Sleperton, near Seaborough."

"You have a picture of the Manor. I have a very good mind to take a trip to Sleperton and try to see her; she may be unhappy, possibly feel glad to see me." The old pastor secretly favored the scheme, thinking it might in some circuitous manner bring about a reconciliation; but aware of St. Aubyn's dislike to intrusion of any sort in his private affairs, he forbore to countenance it by assent or advice.

Willie Arden walked down to the village, to a gray stone cottage, where his face was welcome as the sunshine, where an honest fisherman and his good wife, provided for and admitted to the close friendship of this grateful scholar, were longing for the coming of their generous helper. The children saw him first, coming down the village street, and ran in to mother with glad speed with the tidings that Mr. Willie was in sight. And he entered with his cheeriest word, and the laughter never altogether absent in his gravest moods, enlivening them instantly, as such a visitor will, shaking hands warmly, and sitting down with that happy freedom which was one of the qualities endearing him to them and others.

"Well, old friend, how fares it with you?"

"Comfortably, Mr. William, thanks to you, Sir. Without your help we'd found it hard, I reckon, getting through the winter."

"We were both of us near to seeing no winter at all, Brown; but I hope you have looked to the new yacht?"

"She's in good trim, Mr. William, and will be ready for your summer cruise, Sir."

"A handsomer craft than the last; but I liked the old one best, Brown."

"So did I, Sir; never shall get used to this one so pleasantly."

"We shall see. I've set my mind upon a Mediterranean trip this summer, and you shall accompany me."

"I thank ye, Sir," and the old fisherman, touched his forehead respectfully, while his face brightened with the anticipation. He loved the water, had been on it from boyhood; even the sharp lesson of its fury failed to decrease that fondness for its shifting humors. When it had come so near to losing life thereby, no bitterness was in the faithful heart, but a readiness to accept from the elements he had served all his life rough treatment and, if need be, a cruel death; and when one came without the other, Brown bore no ill-will—as these constant fellows on the coast seldom do—but was first to the great heaving billows with the net to help poor comrades, who were not provided for like himself.

From there Willie Arden walked on to another of his father's people—who loved both father and son with the strong affection of these northern natures—to the fisher-folk, and the tillers of the soil, and the workers upon the old brown coal called jet. And these constituted the larger portion of the little flock. Often in boyhood had Willie stood watching the rapidly revolving buffers polishing the pieces from which the scar on the surface had been first removed, level cut pieces, polished by lamp-black upon those soft leather buffers, watching the process with the interest of boyhood, which stands absorbed before every thing significant of activity, from the blacksmith's forge to the shuttle. He went among these humble affectionate folk, as was his custom when at home, and then, having made the round, giving a look in at most, he returned to dinner, with this piece of intimation tendered with dutiful respect. "If you don't mind, father, I purpose, as I said, running down to Sleperton. It's a long way, but I shall enjoy the ride."

"As you please, my boy. I am sure you will act for the best."

With what a happy smile he inclined his head! Perfect confidence, love, honor, and respect rendered the mutual love of these two a type of the beautiful sentiment it should be.

And next day Willie Arden journeyed to Sleperton, with which locality he would have been lightly impressed, had it not been for the fact of the annual fair, just at that time being celebrated, having presented a scene of excitement and business which pleased him as fully as it would have done a great boy home from school. As, however, there was attraction greater even than the fair in close proximity to that pretty Green, he could only make for the Cottage; and he stood before it, upon the edge of the grass with the roadway between, and behind him the straggling booths, with the great tent of a circus in the centre. He stood looking at the picturesque dwelling, just such a bower as he would have liked to spend the greater part of his days in with—with—her.

Then, glancing at the window, where she usually sat, he saw her, lovely as ever, a degree more thoughtful-looking, but none the worse for that. She did not at first see him; he stood there, however, until she did, and when in time her glance fell upon the hero of that early dream, she could scarcely believe her eyes. The next moment, with a little joyful cry, she arose hurriedly, ran past the surprised Martha Saxe, down stairs almost at a bound, brushing the dress of the elegant widow coming forth to ascertain the cause of the commotion, out through the porch and along the garden path, across the road, and, regardless of the look of it, threw her arms about the friend from home; then, mindful all at once of her good resolutions, stood blushing and embarrassed, yet contriving to stammer forth, "I am so glad to see you; you've come for me, I know!" Willie, who had been taken by storm, and who thought that at all events his sweetheart had not mended her manners, was troubled to know what to answer, and said, "Yes, I've come for you; are you ready to go back?"

To which the wild one, in an ecstasy of delight, replied, "I should think I am. Just wait till I've got my hat; never mind the other things; and if Martha won't come, she may stop!"

"Not at all," said prudent Willie, gentleman ever. "If Martha does not come, I can't take you; but how about your friend Mrs. Vincent?"

"Well, I shall not take any notice of her. She's fond of serving me like that; now it will be my turn."

All was so sudden, Mr. Arden was quite unprepared. Her eagerness was more than he had bargained for, if not more than he had hoped; but even thus overtaken his natural delicacy led him to express his wish for the attendance of her maid.

Lena on her part, all excitement and impulse, overjoyed by the sight of this friend, whom she felt she could trust implicitly, never thought of that powerful mediator, the Minister, even then absent in her interests, and who, with his calm influence, might do so much more for her than could this younger man, already regarded with suspicion.

Hurrying back again, Lena was confronted by the amazed and indignant mistress of the house, with "So, young lady, this will be pretty conduct to be communicated to your guardian!"

Without deigning to answer her, Lena hastened to her chamber and locked the door, scaring her faithful attendant by instructions to put together such few necessary things as would be required, for they were going home with Willie Arden, who had come expressly. Mrs. Saxe knew her too well to remonstrate, and obeyed with the silent service characteristic of the woman.

When her preparations were completed, the strong-minded young lady marched down stairs followed by her servant, the astounded widow falling back a pace at the foot, while demanding an explanation. Lena ignored the lady and her request together, walking on with determination, and joining Mr. Arden, they went their way without more ado, Mrs. Saxe with a civil obeisance to the widow.

Past the old Manor-house, where the blinds of all front windows were drawn close; past the central tent of the fair, the applause of the spectators echoing as they walked on, to the graceful performance of a lovely girl who had never shown such zest and spirit, never looked half so beautiful.

With a slightly heightened color Mrs. Vincent penned these few lines to St. Aubyn:

"In spite of all my care, Lena eloped with some fast-looking young man this afternoon at 5.30. You will remember my opinion from the portrait, uttered with regret but in sincerity; to-day's event confirms my prophecy."

Then she murmured, "Well, I do think this ought to settle it."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN EMBARRASSING MISSION.

A DOUBLE errand took Mr. Garland to the north. His time was very valuable, he had little to spare, still he earnestly desired to see what could be done for two persons in whom he experienced profound interest in two very different quarters. Miss St. Aubyn and Sir Dickson Cheffinger were thus again, indirectly, in juxtaposition. And first he would go to Yorkshire, to the House upon the Cliff, there seek audience of the recluse, and plead for the lonely child he was befriending. While contemplating this, he little imagined the surprise in store for him.

The Minister stood before the great gate awaiting admission; he had sent in his card by Williams notwithstanding the man's repeated assurance that his master would not see any visitors. And the man had gone on his mission dubiously, with the message that a clergyman wished for a few minutes' audience. He returned with the master's compliments and a peremptory refusal to see the gentleman. Then Mr. Garland adopted this method—he sent word that he had recently had an interview with Miss St. Aubyn. Mr. St. Aubyn knew that already, and hated him like poison for it; the widow's letters had certainly caused the recluse to detest this particular man rather more than his race generally. He returned this answer: "The Rev. Mr. Garland may remain at the gate till a cathedral is built over him before he shall enter here!" The Rev. Mr. Garland, with a gentle smile that won the heart of Williams entirely, returned answer courteously and firmly that his errand would not permit of his going until he had seen Mr. St. Aubyn, and he would patiently await his convenience. This struck the master as a mild sort of reply to his surly message, and he bade Williams return to the kitchen and not trouble any more about it. Westley Garland had been born too near a wood to be terrified by the hooting of owls, and sat him down on the rock, by the gate, very much admiring the little ferns growing thereabout, and the fair scene outspread beyond, and not in the least disturbed. In his pocket he had a gem edition of the Archbishop of Cambray's *Telemachus*, and he was deep in the old delight when he heard a step on the pavement of the court. The master, unable to quiet a feeling of uneasiness, had come to peep at the Minister, who was the latest person of note in that world from whence *he* had fled. But when he recognized in the man reclining at ease and reading the friend of long ago, his wonder was extreme. Unbarring the gate instantly, he hastened out to him, and the surprise of the one as they greeted each other was not deeper upon discovering in the famous preacher the friend he so much esteemed as Lionel Travers, than was that of the other in finding that the recluse was Lord Lindon, whose history had of late occupied so much of the Minister's thoughts. They went in-doors, and in the quiet privacy of St. Aubyn's choice retreat favored each other with explanations. There was much to hear, much to be told, and the gentlemen were talking a long time, so long that the daylight faded, and the room grew dusk, before the Minister approached the special theme of his visit; at last he said, "Now I must refer to your own recent and more delicate affairs. I was with your Lena yesterday!" and the other became gloomy instantly.

"I would so much rather not hear any thing upon that painful subject. I am curing myself, I hope, of my weakness, but shall never do so while dwelling on the memory; the wound is very tender yet, I assure you."

"I know it; but before leaving you I hope to do something toward healing that wound."

"I have heard," said the other, with a courteous smile, "you are the chevalier of distressed humanity."

"Depend upon it, my lord, I find very many wounded in the world in one way or another."

"But do you not think some wounds heal quicker for being left alone?"

"Undoubtedly; this is one of them; after today."

"Before I hear any thing you have to say, and which I would listen to from no other person in the world—pardon me if I speak first—you will then judge better of the advisability of entering further into the discussion."

"By all means."

"You are aware of the wretched termination to my married life, aware of my purpose when first taking and training this pretty piece of treachery, aware of the awful blow it was to me, when I returned here, to find—to find—no matter. Now, my friend, would you deem it charity to revive a man's liking for the snake that had stung him and would sting him again upon the earliest opportunity? It would be more merciful to leave his affections to grow cool as philosophy and calm as science, when dispassionately, from a safe distance, the manners and instincts of reptiles may be studied without injury. I need hardly say so, but much I wonder whether, if I paid a flying visit to the world, I should find one woman quietly at home with her needle-work, faithful to her husband, living for her children, mindful of her God?"

Mr. Garland, ever the champion of the sex censured, would, at any other time, have expressed himself warmly in its defense, but his solicitude dwelt upon particular members thereof too deeply to endanger their cause by losing time over argument. "We will leave that. I plead now for one whose sin has been very great, yet whose pitiful yearning for forgiveness and union with her children has moved me to intrude upon you."

The manner, gentle, considerate, full of feeling, even more than the words, prepared the suffering nobleman for confirmation of a horrible suspicion gradually dawning upon him. And he could almost catch from the other's trembling utterance how the disclosure pained him who had thus accepted the unpleasant office of revealing the singularly sad connection.

"My plainness will be very painful to you," continued the mediator, "but it is not more cruel than prolonging an announcement which wounds while it may heal. Some of the ties in life are so underlaid with solemn design, we poor human beings can only stand by, wondering and questioning; the powers of good and the powers of evil are so inextricably interwoven. The Lena you have loved and have discarded is the child of Lady Lindon."

Lord Lindon arose from his chair; it was very dark, and the anguish upon the face could not be seen by the other, but he guessed it, and was moved to intense sympathy. It had been an embarrassing revelation, but Mr. Garland felt it would be false pity to prolong it. For a few minutes the agony of it caused bewilderment, then, gradually, all asserted its order, and the incidents of the past and of the present came out wonderfully vivid.

"And I have been harboring the child of that infamy and trouble! Nay, but it increases the horror of this time!"

"Only for a season; be brave, look it in the face; think how the child has loved you, and still loves you!"

"While my own girl has been the devil knows where! I thank you, Sir, but if this is how things are going on in the world of which you entertain such hope, I don't admire their order. It strikes me no one could have wished myself a more diabolic sequence."

"You will pass through this gloomy stage and come forth calm, prepared to meet and to forgive your wife. She but asks for this. You will not deny her one meeting for the purpose of making the remainder of her life more happy!"

"It would be an interview of exceeding pain to both, and, as I think, a useless ordeal. It is almost too much to expect of one who has suffered as I have done."

"I am conscious of the magnanimity required, the courage, ay, and of the Christian spirit; but I have hope of you, knowing the fine nature to which I plead."

"Which would lead you to presume. Have some regard for that fineness of feeling you accredit me with. An interview with Lady Lindon is simply impossible, unless some great revolution of feeling gives me more strength and calmness than I now possess."

"I have no fear; the noble bravery inherited of a noble line both chivalrous and good will come to your aid. Could I tell you how that lonely lady, aloof in her inexorable pride from all human sympathy and fellowship, from all Divine consolation, how she lives upon the hardly defined, the scarcely expected, hope of this, it would move you to, at least, assure her you forgive the past—"

"But I don't, my good Sir!" interrupted his lordship, irately, for this perseverance taxed him almost beyond endurance. The other knew it, but thought more of those for whom he was pleading, and he said, with great emotion, "I plead for no common penitence, and for a heart so difficult to deal with it would break with longing for this before ever it advanced a step to seek it. Lady Lindon—forgive me—presented to my first view every objectionable feature ever possessed by woman; but I have learned to know her better."

"Yes," replied his lordship, with saturnine, moody bitterness, "your position is a tolerably safe one; but I wonder the view you would take in my place. An old writer said, Man could swallow any thing, give him the time; but if I digest the morsel you have been good enough to bring, I must be either more than human, or aided by a Higher power."

"Such will be forth-coming when you are prepared to receive it. Meanwhile I entreat you will first, as of supreme importance, deliberate upon a meeting with Lady Lindon."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHEFFINGER *v.* CHEFFINGER.

Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger's tenure of Cheffinger, although of lengthened period and of apparent security, was, after all, one of hazard and uncertainty so long as that half-witted cousin in the distance was at large. Poor Cousin Dickson would never do any thing of himself, for he was wretchedly low in the social status, and Sir Claude took care to keep him so; yet there was no telling but that absurd crotchet of Dickson's, in regard to titled folk and folk without title, to whom he granted dignities as required, might lead to this awkward and uncertain cousin some day finding a friend who would make Dickson's representation a matter of close investigation; and Sir Claude knew well his claim to the Abbey, once opened to question, could not be sustained as far as he was concerned. It was a grisly piece of realism that, shirk it how he might, stared him in the face, and gave him but little rest. He might be steered clear of, for the remaining years of his life, now that so many had passed on undisturbed; but it was equally as possible at any time somebody might run down to Cheffinger upon unpleasant business. Sir Claude endeavored to ignore the ugly probability, filled his house with a merry company from year's end to year's end, favored sport, patronized art, simulated science, affected literature, was much liked, counted an open-hearted English gentleman, and was so; cheaply!

Great were the festivities at the Abbey; not now and then, but all the year round. In doors and out a continuous round of pastime and pleasure; but it did not relieve its owner of the dark shadow looming over every scheme for the enjoyment of life. Sir Claude disliked being alone, and as a matter of fact was seldom alone. He indulged his passion for the chase to the utmost, and found it a tolerably fair antidote to gloom. Varied was the sport, when from August a large party of his town and country friends assembled at Cheffinger, and either in the neighborhood or at a distance gave themselves up to the delights of the autumn: blackcock, grouse, bustard, moor game, black game, partridge, and quail; then off and on for a month, buck and red deer. In October they commenced pheasant-shooting, the great preserves on distant confines of the estate resounded with the firing of the sportsmen. Hind and fox hunting varied the sport, while some sniggled for eels. With November the pursuit changed for woodcocks, and as the year drew toward its close the shooting of these became more exciting. In December, the Abbey revived the old customs and good cheer that once gave this land the style of Merry England. Sir Claude's argument was an eminently politic one. Said he, "In case I ever have to give it up, I will enjoy it now I've got it." He did so, as much as a man could with the sword of Damocles suspended above him. Really, however, these swords are plentiful as Sheffield blades, and the men and women above whom they are hanging contrive, notwithstanding, to jog on pretty comfortably. Sir Claude did so at all events, until one morning a strange conveyance startled the deer, and sent them herding beneath the trees at a far-off corner of the park, where there was no road, and silence reigned magnificent as in the Highlands. Sir Claude always had one eye on the alert for any unknown and peculiar-looking personage. The individual thus arriving without invitation was not a pleasant-looking gentleman, and the proprietor of Cheffinger Abbey experienced that cold thrill which people of his warmly hospitable temperament particularly dislike. The stranger's card was handed to Sir Claude—it bore the name of *Coke O'Connor*—and Sir Claude gave orders that the gentleman should be shown to the library. The name afforded no indication of his business. Sir Claude had an unpleasant twitter of the eyes when uneasy, and in walking to the library his eyes twittered like those of a dormouse when it wakes, after a long sleep, to find itself under the guardianship of a cat.

Mr. O'Connor's appearance did not tend to reassure the owner of the Abbey, who bowed distantly, his eyes still twittering before the dagger-like point of the dark man's imperial.

"I have the honor," said the dark man, "to speak to Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger?"

"The same, Sir."

"I have run down from town to see you upon a little matter of business connected with the estate; you will permit me to introduce myself as a member of the firm of *Barnard and O'Connor*, *Cursitor Street*. My respected partner is so much engaged or he would have waited upon you himself."

"Will you take a chair, Sir?" said the owner of CHEFFINGER, with affability.

The gentleman from Cursitor Street took a chair, and sat thereon with profound legislative impudence, drawing his closed hand carefully down his imperial as if feeling for the commencement of his brief.

"Our firm has lately had the disputed CHEFFINGER question before it. A person known as Dickson Cheffinger, claiming to be the rightful heir, and ascertained to be in some remote relation connected with yourself, is about to lay his petition before her Majesty."

"Who, of course, is well aware, Sir, that in every body corporate of her subjects there are two-thirds impostors."

"Of course," assented the other, dryly; "but there is the scandal all the same, only to be avoided by good management."

Sir Claude fidgeted restively, and then said,

"Pardon me, can I offer you a glass of wine?"

"No, I thank you; during professional hours I never take it."

"Ah, just so; er—I was going to say I fancy I've heard of this fellow Dickson Cheffinger—not sure it's the same, but doesn't he labor under some curious hallucination, fancying himself and others all sorts of things? He's a lunatic, or something in that way; at all events, not quite bright. I'm not sure, but it strikes me I've heard my people talk of some such being."

"It is evidently the same, Sir Claude; he's very curious. Mr. Barnard observed to me in confidence that it was a pity such people should be permitted to go about, disturbing old county families, and making a would-be hash of all Conservative interests. There ought to be some restraining influence upon such people."

"And so there ought, Sir; what are the mad-houses for, I should like to know? Good conscience, but society is coming to a pretty pass if land-owners are to be bearded by every demented pauper with the requisite audacity! I won't encourage it, Sir; I never will encourage it. My friends are all men of large landed importance, and in their interests—in their interests, Sir—I discountenance all such violations of hereditary privilege; and to mark my sincerity, as a first step in a crusade against fraud, I am content to place in the hands of any respectable firm of solicitors five hundred pounds toward suppressing this vagabond, and I will pay to the said firm as many thousands to encourage and support the ancient prerogative of justice—when this latest barefaced impostor is placed in some mad-house, where he can indulge his fancy at his leisure without injury to his fellow-creatures who are sane. It shows a shocking state of things in an enlightened country like this, Mr. O'Connor!"

"Oh, very, very! My friend Mr. Barnard was only saying yesterday, it really seems as though things were growing worse and worse! Reflective observers view such mendacious impostors with painful apprehension, Sir Claude. I am sure I am justified in the name of the firm I represent in accepting your proposed noble contribution toward the preservation of honor and the support of the institutions of the High Court of Justice."

"Well, you have heard my proposition and can act as you think advisable. Of course to a certain extent I am actuated by interested motives, because any family disputes are attended with serious inconvenience, property is impoverished, and seldom any satisfactory end gained. I mention this because, while wishing to benefit others situated in a similar position, I have a decided reluctance to become the peg upon which an old worn-out suit of litigation is to be hung."

"I apprehend your meaning, Sir Claude, and beg to assure you the transaction shall be conducted with strict privacy."

"Yes—thank you. And as a guarantee of my good faith and the interest I take in the matter, permit me to hand you the little preliminary advance mentioned."

This settled it; and the Cursitor Street gentleman withdrew in a business-like and perfectly respectful manner. Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger, of CHEFFINGER, rejoined his guests, breathing more freely than he had done for a long time past. He perfectly understood the type of legal gentleman that had waited upon him; and Sir Claude was quite of opinion that, next to an unprincipled doctor, an unprincipled lawyer is the most dangerous being on earth, although he may be made a valuable auxiliary in the carrying out of villainy. Altogether, Sir Claude considered it an advantageous move in his tactics of possession, and thus thought, until one day another visitor appeared in the person of a clergyman, a man of exquisite address, whom it was impossible to be offended with, coming, moreover, with an introduction from one of Sir Claude's especial favorites, Frank, Lord Ellerby.

The clergyman, well known in the literary world, whose name was held in esteem by all classes, explained that he was travelling that way, much wishing to see the old paintings of which his friend, Lord Ellerby, had spoken with rapturous enthusiasm, loving, moreover, all these ancient dwelling-places, and so ventured to take advantage of the introduction and trespass upon Sir Claude's kindness. Sir Claude, who, as he said, had always room for another, and thought "the more the merrier," extended the hospitality for which he was noted with a bluff grace which put the Minister instantly at ease, although it pricked his conscience, seeing that he was there more particularly in his friend Dickson's interests; but thinking the end justified the means, the Minister made careful and appreciative scrutiny of Cheffinger Abbey. Sir Claude, with jovial bonhomie, said, "I give my guests the run of the place, Mr. Garland; pray make yourself at home as much as the rest." The Minister accepted the run, but it was a slightly different run to that usual with the Abbey guests. Securing the company of an old servant his discriminating insight had discovered among the retainers, he attached the garrulous old man to his expedition in apparent quest of out-of-the-way old paintings, carving, antique metal-work, rare binding, tomes deep in dust, quaint chests full of parchments and deeds whereon writing was well-nigh illegible, and other treasures dear to the antiquary; and his companion and guide was in his element also, since he could gossip discursively until he was tired. It was a novel pleasure to the old man; they would not listen to his idle chatter down below, but left him to himself while they talked sport and slang, stable and kitchen classics. And all the time Sir Claude was with the guests, enjoying the chase with renewed ardor, the clergyman and his guide were deep in the Abbey heir-looms, and sat down to rest a while on a great worm-eaten chest. The process of resting did not stem the flow of information; this old man was full to the soul of olden records and events of interest connected with the home life of the Cheffingers for generations past. It was naturally with the last owner he was most intimately acquainted, and of that singular old man he had much to say. He told of distant coldness in his treatment of this Claude Cheffinger, whom he seemed to regard with morbid suspicion, and upon one occasion openly declared his will was made in favor of a poor relative, Claude's senior, and who would become his heir, if only for never troubling him once in his life. Here the Minister listened eagerly, and asked the name of this unoffending member of the family.

"His name was Dickson Cheffinger," replied the old man, "and I know the will was made in his favor, for I was one of the witnesses."

"And this Dickson Cheffinger, then, is the rightful heir to the estates?"

"Hush!" said the old man, cautiously; "if Sir Claude knew I prattled of this he would discharge me, and I wouldn't like to leave the Abbey now. Yes, had that will been forth-coming, Sir Dickson's claim would have been established, but it wasn't, and Sir Claude entered upon possession, by the dying wish, it was said, of my old master. Sir Dickson, as I understood, spent all his means at that time upon asserting his rights, but his means were small and went but little way, and Sir Claude remained the undisturbed possessor. I did hear that it preyed upon the other's mind sadly, and it is an unjust thing, for the Lord be with the right, say I!"

"He always is, my friend; but He knows it is good for the worthy to be a while in obscurity, and thus worth comes to perfection."

"Then there's a lot o' folk on the road to being perfect, I take it." The Minister smiled at his dry way of putting it.

"And about the will; you believe Claude Cheffinger destroyed it?"

"No, I don't," answered the old man, quickly, "for he could never find it; he was suspected, and it was put away for a better than he to find. You'd never believe how cunning and suspicious, and hateful of having him with him the master became toward the end." Mr. Garland had not personally seen any thing to dislike in Claude Cheffinger, who received him with every courtesy, but he knew that the presentient prejudice of the aged when nearing mortality is without the pale of our every-day reasoning and favor.

"And have you never made search for this yourself, in the interests of that right you approve?"

"I have done so, but it's a difficult thing to do alone, and Sir Claude is quick. He would guess I'd a motive if he heard of it, because I know the contents and witnessed it. I shouldn't have been here now if you hadn't picked me out, so that nobody could say any thing. I've rather avoided coming up here, because from my knowledge of the old master he would very likely hide it somewhere hereabout; and I don't want Sir Claude to turn me off now."

"Well, let us make systematic and minute search wherever you fancy it is most likely to be hidden, and if found, I will guarantee you shall not leave the Abbey, and shall, moreover, be liberally provided for during the remainder of your life. I am the sole friend of Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and I am here in his interests and for this very purpose."

The old man paused a moment, passed his hand across his brow, and seemed to be lost in thought; then, without speaking a word, joined the other at his close examination of the Abbey lumber. Every thing was contained in the old garrets, from chipped paintings to broken cabinet-work, from Venetian glass to Parisian *armes de luxe*. Mr. Garland took up one of the latter curiously and with some admiration; the stock was carved in low relief, the foot being ornamented in silver with Diana preparing for the chase, the barrel with oak foliage, the sides with an animal hunt, in which a frightened wolf upon a tree stump formed the hammer. Claude Cheffinger thought a smooth, perfect English fowling-piece superior to the most artistically executed fusils of Paris or St. Étienne, and consigned beautiful pieces by such celebrated gun-makers as the famous La Roche, Langevin, Le Hollandais, and Bouillet to oblivion in an oak chest, with small respect for sport of the old school or the traditions of his ancestors.

A line of long, low, quaintly constructed windows, designed to make the exterior picturesque, admitted light to the very extremities of the garret, where the sloping, shelving roof inclined to the flooring, and yielded covert to the rats and mice, a wonderful race in the garrets of CHEFFINGER; fat, sleek, and indolent, and not in the least disposed to show respect to the Minister; but he would not have harmed even a rat, until it was clear to him the same was a usurper. This domain afforded the tribe the exercise felled woodlands offer the rabbits, for here had been thrown old rolls of paper-hanging, as, from time to time, proprietor by proprietor, the Abbey walls had been decorated according to the taste of the period; very gorgeous were some of these, as, partly unrolled, they were outspread and laid in confusion, Eastern flowers upon Italian scrolls, and pilasters and panels of tarnished gilt on the delicate chintz-patterned, diapered, and silken-surfaced papers of France.

"He was very deep, you know," whispered the old man, hands and knees on the floor, pulling the dusty rolls away, and keenly scrutinizing the roof and floor where they met at an angle. "He'd put it where a sharp body like Sir Claude, even, would not think of looking for it; that's why I leave the chest and other things to look round the flooring." He was knocking with his knuckles while whispering this on the inclined ceiling, and the Minister, stooping, watched operations with keen interest. The whitewash sounded evenly solid, and left no suspicion of the smallest hollow existing; the boards of the flooring had evidently not been disturbed since there laid down. The old man crawled backward, and slowly resumed a standing position, complaining he did not feel so young and active as of yore. And then his face shone, a bright idea having returned to him. "I've often thought there's room under the eaves for hiding any thing, and not many would think of looking there."

"Yes; but, my good friend, would not your old master equally much have cared to place the will where it *would* some day be found by a person favorable to Sir Dickson? And it seems to me hiding it below the eaves would imperil the prospect of its ever being found at all."

"Ay, it do seem like it, what with the weather and the rooks."

"We must continue our search among the curiosities, depend upon it."

The cheerfulness with which the Minister recommenced betokened that it was no distasteful occupation. To some minds such exploration possesses fascination; like turning over the contents of an old book-store, each upheaval brings to light something valued in the past by those whose span is shorter than that of such objects, but whose soul lives, as the soul of a book lives long, when paper is worm-eaten and binding and incasing have gone to dust. With a half-reverent touch the Minister reversed the relics and remains: steel coffers with intricate locks; bellows of walnut-wood carved in high relief; flasks in *cuir bouilli;* Damascened metallic mirrors; old roundels of beech-wood, painted with mottoes; drug pots dating from days of the witch-finders; antique Hispano-Moresco ware, broken, defaced, and useless, but still beautiful, and historic of Spanish periods; a bronze bust, its cold, green-black, stolid face veiled by more tender lines—thanks to the spiders—than in the life or out of it had been its portion; lacquered ware of a by-gone fashioning, broad and unsightly; an old shield, the tazza studded with antique coins, having a recumbent lion at top, supporting an enamelled coat of arms; a frieze of hunters, *à l'antique*—they might for their condition have been to the wars; a celadon vase in pieces—each piece a gem; and an old genealogical chart, with the record of patents of nobility and grants of land bestowed upon the Cheffingers of Cheffinger. This last was in a carved frame; no glass covered it, the dust lay thick on it; and for the moment Mr. Garland believed it one of those samplers the dames of fine degree delighted to mark, in perpetuation of their own skill and their ancestors' birthdays; but, taking it up, he discovered its significance, and traced with surprise the high lineage of CHEFFINGER; and he was following with his finger the various nobles and honors of the family, when it traced a line not marked upon the parchment; some folded document was inserted between the chart and the board at its back.

"I've found it, I verily believe!" and rather elated by the discovery, Westley Garland, without compunction, stripped Cheffinger of its honors in favor of its latest representative. The old retainer leaned nervously by him, and shook while the Minister removed and unfolded the will.

"Yes, that's it, and there's my name!" pointing it out with tremulous excitement.

Coolly as he had once before placed in his pocket a very different document in which Sir Dickson Cheffinger was interested, did the Minister secure the will. He again assured the old servant of future reward, and having bestowed present highly liberal recompense, Mr. Garland quitted Cheffinger Abbey while Sir Claude was with his guests still enjoying the chase with renewed ardor.

* * * * * *

Returning to his humble lodging one evening, very fagged and worn, Mr. Cheffinger was surprised to find a curious-looking individual awaiting him, and it is notable that for this person, perhaps stirred by an inner sense of distrust, he found no title whatever. In truth, he was not prejudiced in favor of the stranger by his appearance, which, many as were the singular beings with whom Mr. Cheffinger mixed, was, in his opinion, the most singular he had seen yet. It was no other than the energetic Mr. Rolf, still upon the business of his chief; and the visit was intended to be an exceedingly serious one, so far as Dickson Cheffinger was concerned. Without paying the poor gentleman even the compliment of calling in the faculty for an affirmative opinion, it was definitely decided that Dickson Cheffinger should be consigned to a mad-house, and, for economy, to a private establishment of the lower and more brutal order.

"In taking this step," the chief explained, "we are studying the interests of society. This man has no business to be at large; if he isn't mad, he ought to be; it won't be safe for people to walk about the public streets soon. The government is negligent; we set the example, as we often do; initiate the prosecution, sustain the whole cost of the inquiry, maintain this afflicted fellow-being while under restraint; and if, after this service to our country, we are not deserving of special commendation next session, I shall lose faith in the morality and grateful appreciation of my countrymen."

Mr. Cheffinger was late; he had kept the visitor in a state of impatient waiting a very long time. The most uncertain being in existence, Mr. Cheffinger yet contrived to arrive home each evening some time between six and nine o'clock; his best friend would not have ventured to predict to half an hour the time of his appearing. The landlady gruffly told Mr. Rolf that her lodger came home to tea; and he, unaware of the Cheffinger laxity in regard to the time of taking that meal, had been irritably waiting since half past four. Mr. Cheffinger appeared upon the scene at half past eight, when the visitor introduced his business without further ceremony. "Sir Dickson Cheffinger, I think?" with a short, surly inclination of the head. Mr. Rolf was not one to waste politeness, especially upon some one going immediately into a strait-waistcoat.

"The same, Sir." With a very gracious bow; for Cheffinger would have honored his executioner with a gracious bow.

"Cousin of Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger?" giving an upward jerk of the head, which might or might not indicate the last-named cousin's head being decidedly riveted the tightest, in the opinion of Mr. Bartholomew.

"His remote cousin, Sir!" Mr. Cheffinger mildly explained. He had suffered too keenly through that usurper to admit the relationship with any extravagant pleasure.

"Of Cheffinger Abbey?" Bartholomew might have been the ancient parish beadle calling over the roll preliminary to the other's refreshing season in the stocks.

The poor gentleman did not notice it; mere cold mention of the well-loved name thrilled him, sent the color to his face, warmed him to the heart, and he repeated, with enthusiasm, "Yes, of Cheffinger Abbey!" leaning hungrily upon the words to come. Oh, to hear something of CHEFFINGER!

"You will please accompany me to my house to-night, and start with me by first train to-morrow morning. These are the wishes of Sir Claude himself."

"My patience! you don't say so? His heart is touched at last! He will make restitution yet." The speaker went up close to his wolfish informant, laid a finger upon his greasy cuff, looked full at the bristly chin—not at the eyes, they made him feel uncomfortable—and he said, in a low, solemn voice, "I've been waiting so long for justice—forty years, Sir—and it doesn't come; so this movement on the part of Claude is doubly welcome. It is a long time where one is not provided for."

"My principal will see about providing for you without loss of time; we'll start."

He opened the door. The poor gentleman was, like the other, eager to depart. One look round, a sort of good-by look such as the tender-hearted bestow before leaving some scene of pain, anxiety, or struggle for a different sphere, and then he went to a dirty little sideboard, and took therefrom a cracked old china tea-cup. It had no saucer, and looked very desolate and isolated, yet from this the Princess had taken tea with Sir Dickson Cheffinger, and it had been precious to him ever since. He regarded it with fondness a minute or two, while the tall man waited in the doorway, thinking what a piece of justice it was, this contemplated fettering of so mad a being; then Mr. Cheffinger asked seriously,

"I suppose I am not likely to return here?"

"Not at all likely."

"Then I must settle with my landlady." The visitor raised no objection, and he did so, joining his guide after a few minutes, the tea-cup, of which he had become the happy possessor, being safely stowed away in his pocket.

Mr. Bartholomew Rolf took particular care that his easily knocked about companion was not upset during the journey. Upon arriving at his dwelling in Gray's Inn Road, he at once ushered the Cheffinger claimant into the presence of Mrs. Rolf, who was sitting before the fire roasting chestnuts, her shoes—large, square-toed shoes—on the upmost bar.

Taking advantage of her mother's being asleep and of Mr. Rolf's being away, Edith Lessie had paid a surreptitious visit to the unhappy captive of a dark back-room, where little Ella had been securely locked up; and of all the miserable adventures that had befallen the child this was the most painful. Pale, and with traces of many tears on the delicate cheeks, she, with her softer, harmless, appealing beauty, quite moved the heart of the daughter of Laïs; and she went to her to comfort her. She did not succeed very well, having nothing comforting to say, and being unable to comply with Ella's entreaty to be let out into the street—any where to get away from that house. But the fourteen-year one took the younger, as an elder girl does, and by that mystic influence none can account for, imparted solace without any talk over it.

Times were looking dark with the Minister's daughter. Now by laws passing in life as coincidences, in drama as extravagancies, that feeble one, the man they thought mad, who had been so long upon the trail of this same girl, and with whom times were so dark, was brought to that house also, captive to the strength and cunning of these brutal tools of the chief. Altogether the Rolf family proved faithful in the service of the devil.

Mrs. Rolf did not alter her lady-like position; Mr. Cheffinger stood looking at the back view of the coil of yellow hair; Mr. Rolf drew off his long brown coat, which with his hat he gave to Edith, saying, "Take the gentleman's." The gentleman handed his threadbare great-coat to the girl with a polite bow and most agreeable smile. Cheffinger was quite himself. Things were taking a turn; ere very long he would come into possession of his own; he felt it so, and was happy, and with great gallantry went near the fire and made a polite bow also to the lady warming her toes. But Mrs. Rolf caught up the fire-shovel, and cried out, with expression, "Don't you come snickering around me. Keep him off, Bartholomew, or I don't answer for the consequences!"

Neither could Bartholomew; therefore he called off the being who affrighted his lady. Mr. Cheffinger supposed her to be troubled with chilblains, and was animated with pity; he seated himself at the faded table-cover, following thereon with his finger a line straggling away, and which seemed to him mapping the road to CHEFFINGER. Mr. Rolf said,

"I think I should like some tea, my dear."

"At this time of night? Won't whiskey do?"

"Do afterward; at present I prefer t'other, for I've been done out o' mine waiting for Sir Dickson Cheffinger." Sir Dickson rose, remarking,

"I'm so sorry, and I never offered you any! I was detained; I meant to have come home, too, for I had a letter to write, but the Marquis of Westminster button-holed me so tightly in Palace Yard I couldn't get away; but I apologize, really!"

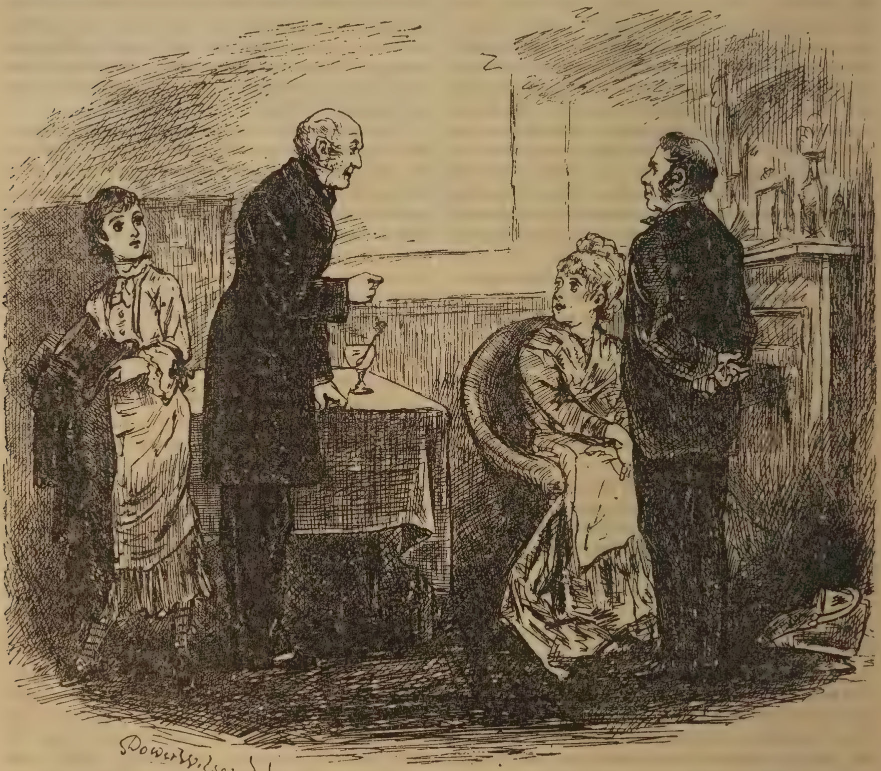
Mrs. Rolf turned herself leisurely, and took a good long look at the speaker, returning to her cookery directly afterward. She had some salt in a piece of newspaper on her knee, and savored the hot nuts at pleasure; but now she placed her paper of salt on the mantel-piece, and raising her apron full of shells, deposited them liberally over fire, hearth, and fender.

"It's an awful bother, Bartholomew, but I suppose if you want tea you must have it."

"I believe that's the rule in this house, Mrs. Rolf." Without further manifestation of annoyance, beyond knocking the crockery about and causing Sir Dickson excruciating terror by her awkwardness, the fair one set tea, dispatching her daughter to the cook-shop for a plate of "chicken and 'am." Altogether, if this couple represented Cousin Claude's choice of acquaintance, Sir Dickson did not think much of his taste.

The viands were brought, and devoured by the host, Sir Dickson, poor gentleman, who was beginning to feel exceeding faint, not being invited to partake of tea or any thing else. After a while Mr. Bartholomew said, "Better show Sir Dickson to his room, my dear."

He followed the lady forth with a courteous good-night to his host, and a kind smile bestowed upon Edith. Outside they passed a tall, singularly upright female, walking with the seriousness of Lady Macbeth, and carrying a tin chamber-candlestick, the extinguisher of which, hanging by a piece of old boot-lace, swung before the spectral lady like a plummet, and seemed designed to preserve her perpendicularity unique. This was Madame Reignard, the other lodger; teacher of the piano, of singing, and of deportment; rather a ghastly person, of an unwholesome sallow hue, and with two large curls either side a face that appeared carved of stone, and to have been left out in the yard to be colored the original London color. Madame was a peculiar person, and while being undoubtedly clever, was distinguished by odd little ways which were a source of great discomfort to her neighbors. One of these eccentricities took the form, whenever she was at home, of sitting at her piano and playing one melody. She had never been known to play any thing else, and as it chanced to be "God save the Queen," it exercised a depressing influence upon those living within hearing, who thus passed an existence upon the brink of something always concluded. Various were the solutions suggested for the phenomenon. One had it that madame held to the conviction that if she did not keep playing this national melody, the queen of the country would topple off the throne; another said the late M. Reignard had been conductor of a popular band, and expired in the performance of this anthem; a third was of opinion that M. and Madame once kept a music-shop, over the door of which were the royal arms, the same having fallen and brained the unfortunate proprietor. All mere speculation, but people do speculate; and these were nothing to some of the ideas broached, all of which had little bearing on the national anthem. Sometimes the lady would rise in the middle of the night, seat herself solemnly on the rickety music-stool, and discourse her favorite tune until every loyal subject within hearing devoutly wished that her Majesty was safe and have done with it.



"AND WITH GREAT GALLANTRY WENT NEAR THE FIRE AND MADE A POLITE BOW."

Sir Dickson Cheffinger looked upon this strange being with emotion; there was a stateliness of mien, and almost regal sternness about the face, that impressed him deeply, and he wondered much what illustrious and unfortunate being she was; perhaps some banished sovereign, or one who had never been banished, and never reigned, but who looked forward with sublime expectancy to the time when that should be. Sir Dickson knew that such things did happen, and he was full of sympathy; and when, some hours later, he was awakened by lugubrious strains, he arose and dressed himself, stood out in the passage in the dark, and listened. At such a time the inspiring if dolorous composition had overpowering effect upon Sir Dickson. All was silent in the house but for that strange performance proceeding from below. To have expected Sir Dickson to control his knightly and chivalrous ardor would have been to expect him to be false to himself. He followed the sound with brave and courtly bearing, knocking his head against every thing that came in his way. When, however, he reached the bottom of the stairs, the music abruptly ceased, and Sir Dickson stood in the passage wondering, while a ray from a Gray's Inn Road gas lamp illumined a flying battalion of beetles. Why had that appeal to the heart so suddenly become silent? Groping about, Sir Dickson all at once became motionless; he heard violent sobbing, and stooping by a door discovered it proceeded from within that chamber. It fired the spirit of romantic enthusiasm, which entered so largely into his being; there could be no doubt the imperial performer was in sore trouble, without a champion, defender, or supporter. He would seek an instant interview, and lay the offer of his service, his sympathy, his allegiance, and his fortune at her gracious feet. He fumbled at the door, first gently knocking, next trying the handle. It was locked fast, and must be locked on the outside, or she could surely open it, if but an inch. The thought of her being a prisoner still further stirred Sir Dickson, and he pondered, ultimately hitting upon a plan that for a man declared mad was a happy one. He cautiously went in search of a key; trying the other doors, and finding one, brought it triumphantly to his captive's door, and excitedly introduced it into the lock, and could neither turn nor withdraw it. Then Sir Dickson pondered again, and tried the refractory instrument once more, humored it this time, and after a due interval of obstinacy it came out with ease. The poor knight found one more key, and with every care applied it to the lock; it opened the door with docility. It was very dark, and Sir Dickson's delicacy induced him to pause, while saying, "I am sorry I have no light with me; you will not distinguish friend from foe. I have come to release you!" The inmate of the chamber uttered a little cry of joy, her sobs ceased, and with eagerness she implored—

"If you will only take me away from here I will pray that you may be rewarded forever, Sir! A woman brought me to this house, pretending she came from my mother. They threaten to kill me if I am not quiet, and I am sure will do so."

"No they will not," said Sir Dickson, "while I am in the house. But who are you? From the voice, it should be a young lady of gentility."

"I am the daughter of Mr. Lionel Travers, of Torquay."

"Now by the peerage is it so? Then I am in fortune's way to-night!" This half to himself, and with no little surprise and gratification.

"And we have lost poor papa; that is why we are in London."

"I know all about it, and will soon have you out of this bewildering city. You've heard your papa talk about his friend Mr. Garland, of course? Well, he has been looking for yourself and Lady Travers for a long time."

It was confusing, and the child felt she had no time to unravel it; the longing for liberty was paramount. She went to his side with touching confidence, and begged, "Take me away, dear Sir, now, lest we be heard."

"To be sure I will; not that there is any thing to fear, Miss Travers, while I am by your side."

He thought of his journey in the morning, and of his prospects. But before these he thought of that good friend in Brighton, whose heart would be gladdened by this recovery or discovery—Sir Dickson did not quite know which—of the little girl. Without hesitation, both as they were, hatless, coverless, hand in hand, they made for the street, Sir Dickson, without excess of caution, unchaining and unbolting the street door. Mrs. Rolf was essentially a sleepy subject, and heard nothing; Mr. Rolf was a hard-worked and fatigued mortal, and slept the sleep of the honorable, and heard nothing; not so the imperial musician, who, sitting at the piano in a somnolent state, suddenly heard the rattle of the chain, and dashed into the anthem for her Majesty's preservation; and this was the thrilling strain that played out Sir Dickson with Ella.

The streets were cold, and, as they hastened along, it all at once occurred to him he had no definite destination. He had rushed out to go to Brighton, but that was scarcely a defined intention. One thing was certain, without overcoat, hat, or a penny piece, leading this lonely child in a corresponding plight, he stood an undoubted chance of being pertinently questioned by the police. Sir Dickson did not particularly love the protectors of our civil rights.

"I know what I will do!" cried Sir Dickson, struck by a bright idea. "I will call upon Lord Dalton; he will aid us in this emergency."

It was a *détour* by faith; he could not tell whether the elegant baronet was in town or no, but he proceeded West, and arrived at Sir Kinnaird's residence in Piccadilly long before the earliest of morning hues lent color to the Park. With a ring that alarmed the entire mansion, Sir Dickson, shivering with the cold, stood upon the step with his young charge. Sir Kinnaird Dalton, who was in town, heard the bell with disgust.

"Fire, bet a sovereign—awful nuisance—wish to goodness I'd got some chloroform in the room, for I couldn't get out of a window if I was singeing!"

The labor of imagining the confusion, the excitement, and subverted order of things consequent upon an alarm of fire, so prostrated the baronet that he drew the eider coverlet, the silk-embroidered blankets, and cobweb tissue sheet well about his delicate ears, and left things to burn or otherwise.

The thoughtful Simmons, much shocked by the unseemly disturbance in the dead of the night, clothed himself hastily and proceeded to ascertain the cause. One of the servants had softly unfastened and opened the door, and was interrogating the man and child upon the door-step when Simmons arrived. That worthy immediately recognized the gentleman of many titles, and inviting him with every consideration into an anteroom, had the door closed again and dispatched the servant to arouse the under-housekeeper, and request she would summon one of the maids. It was all done with that consummate speed, silence, and tact in which Simmons was so perfect an adept. He had no intention of permitting his master to be aroused before the usual time, or to be annoyed by any commotion whatsoever, and, as a matter of fact, Sir Kinnaird had gone to sleep again, quite happy, with the dainty smile upon the mouth, and remarking, with half-cynical sweetness, "If I must burn I must, but at all events it shall be comfortably." It excited him so little that he passed off to sleep instantly; at that hour he did not pretend even to realize the, to most people, highly unpleasant situation. Any situation, either pleasant or unpleasant, Sir Kinnaird avoided carefully; the exertion of grappling with a situation or a position was utterly beyond him.

Simmons, by diligently remembering what he had overheard, knew perfectly well Sir Kinnaird's wishes with respect to the little girl. Simmons had no doubt this was the identical one, and took care to see that herself and her companion were well entertained until Sir Kinnaird rose and dressed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OF BEING WORTH ONE'S WEIGHT IN SILVER.

Great was the annoyance of the heir to Froggypond when he discovered that his revered relative rather sided with those who were anxious to mark their appreciation of the civil, moral, and intellectual worth of which he was the reputed possessor.

"The only thing I have to say against it, Elmore (and I must confess I feel surprised the emblem of our house has not occurred to the people who profess to think so highly of its present representative), is that the service of plate, so far as I can understand, will not perpetuate in gold or silver the memory of our frogs."

"I hope not, I'm sure!"

"Elmore!" The old lady sat bolt-upright in a yellow-brown silk dress covered with large green spots; she looked severely upon her grandson willing to explain—

"I do not care to see our frogs caricatured, dear grandma, and no local craftsman could do justice to them."

Much pacified, Mrs. Elsynge gently went on to say how gratifying to her was this public evidence of the regard in which Elmore was held.

"I have always hoped, my boy, that you would let me see you do something that would be a pride to me."

"But I haven't done any thing, that's the nuisance of it!"

"Never mind; they are going to give you a testimonial, so it is just the same. Depend on't, my dear, unless these shrewd and discriminating men of business had detected that virtue and probity which it has always been the pride of our house to possess, they would never have thought out this elaborate expression of regard, this manifestation of affection for you, this testimonial to the honorable standing of your family. You should feel highly complimented, my dear. For a long time I have known something was about to happen: night after night the venerable friends yonder met at one spot and uttered one sound—it was an anthem of jubilee, Elmore, and it meant that the last of the Elsynges was to be awarded the palm for integrity and virtue."

Mr. Elsynge did not feel to be particularly gifted with either, but he left his grandmamma in blissful ignorance and rode home to dinner.

The gentleman certainly had one weakness that was ineradicable—the love of horses. Actuated by his fondness for equine spectacles, his inclination after dinner led him to pay a visit to Ringdom and Tanner's Hippodrome, then located on the Green. But how far was it consistent for a man about to receive a public testimonial to his civil, moral, and intellectual worth, and who was the present representative of the integrity, virtue, and probity of a family whereof a froggy anthem of jubilee had been celebrated in advance—how far was it consistent for such a one to visit fairs, circuses, and places of worldly amusement? That became the question, and Mr. Elsynge decided to talk it over with his friend Bruce, whose lands and residence adjoined the Elsynge estate. Ernest Bruce shared his friend's fondness for field-sports and equestrian exercise, but having carefully avoided public engagements and connections of all sorts with the class he especially disliked—the commercial community—he laughed very heartily at the dilemma in which his friend was placed, and his advice took the defiant form.

"Give them something to talk about, Elmore, and perhaps they may present it to some other fellow."

"But, you know, I never was a free lance; besides, think of the honored prestige I am expected to support."

"I don't envy you; but by all means let us finish our cigars and go into the tent."

They strolled to the circus, and were ushered to the seats of honor—extremely insecure seats, Mr. Bruce thought. He was a tall, fine-looking man, broad-shouldered, with massive limbs, and possessing innate repugnance to sitting upon a plank, even carpeted. Mr. Elsynge noticed nothing of this, his whole attention from the moment of entering was taken up by observing a beautiful child in the arena.

"A renegade so soon!" said Mr. Bruce, in a low voice, watching his friend's intent interest with excessive amusement.

"My dear fellow, did you ever set eyes on such a lovely girl? What a shame she should be here!"

"Hush! control yourself; remember the testimonial." Mr. Elsynge flushed slightly, threw down the remains of his cigar, shrugged his shoulders, and said,

"What a provoking fellow you are!"

"Envy!"

"I envy these mountebanks always having the company of that girl! I wonder what sort of character she bears?"

"Unapproachable!" said the other, mockingly, and Elsynge tapped his foot with his cane impatiently; it seemed impossible that one with so sweet a face could be aught but of lily fairness of life.

"I think her the most beautiful girl I have ever seen," said he, with unusual seriousness. It alarmed his friend, who entertained a great distaste for a "lower-order admiration," as he termed it.

"I suppose, like myself, you think each fresh face prettier than the last; but take care to view them according to the laws of perspective. I have carefully avoided the weakness, or I should have been very much struck by something or other in every capital in Europe."

Mr. Elsynge changed the subject, his eyes never straying from the girl, however, so long as she was in the ring.

"Fair cattle, are they not, for travellers?"

"Yes. A trainer told me once he could distinguish in the dark, by feeling the hoof, the different classes—farm, road, course, battle-field, and circus. I scarcely believe it, but there is no telling."

Presently the sinuous Joey of Japan made his *entrée*, and the gentlemen took their leave. Mr. Bruce could not witness human gyrations, which he said always gave him a headache, and Elsynge was impatient to go behind. Giving his card to a groom he requested permission to inspect the stud, and was conducted to the impromptu stables with much obsequiousness. Having viewed the animals with genuine and admiring interest, they were about to leave when the young lady herself passed by.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Elsynge, while she looked up timidly at the abrupt address, her large fawn-like eyes glancing rapidly from his broad good-humored face to that of his friend. "Do you make a long stay here?"

"We might stay beyond the three fair days, Sir. I do not know Mr. Ringdom's intentions." And with a modest diffident inclination of the head she passed on.

"Never heard such a voice in my life!" said Elsynge, with enthusiasm, forgetting for the moment the unimpressive character beside him.

"Remember the testimonial!" said Mr. Bruce, with sarcastic drollery; "and now come home and have tea with me. I've some fresh sporting sketches I should like you to see."

Mr. Elsynge accompanied his friend home, where Mrs. Westwood, the housekeeper, did the honors. Mrs. Westwood was a distant relative. Mr. Bruce could never have tolerated an ordinary salaried person in the close contact inevitable where the housekeeper takes supervision of the establishment. Mrs. Westwood was an exceedingly upright, precise, and decorous lady. At one time the Westwoods kept a carriage, and now that the husband who had purchased and supported it for her pleasure was gone to his rest, this lady-like woman could never forget having at one time been the mistress of an establishment of her own. Mr. Bruce entertained great respect for this distant relative, and the distant relative entertained great respect for Mr. Bruce; thus a balance of good-will was very happily preserved. All the same she thought him exceedingly untidy in the house, disliked his habit of smoking, disapproved of that ineffable bias stablewards (poor Westwood had been an intellectual man), and was of opinion that he ought sometimes to go to church instead of reclining all Sunday upon his luxurious couches reading sporting papers. (Mrs. Westwood held a theory that every one possessed of luxuriant furniture ought to go regularly to church—to pray fervently that they might never lose it.) Upon one point the distant relatives agreed beautifully—in their liking for Elmore Elsynge. The lady was very polite to the heir, and at night dreamed of the frogs almost as much as the mistress of Froggypond herself.

When Mr. Elsynge arrived home that evening he found an official-looking communication awaiting him, which read as follows:

"The inhabitants of Seaborough and neighborhood request the attendance of Elmore Elsynge, Esq., at a meeting to be held at the Town-hall to-morrow afternoon at 3 o'clock.

"Dr. Hunter in the chair.

"(Signed) Solomon Simcox, Hon. Sec."

"It's come at last!" muttered the heir, with a moan of repugnance. "I must go through with it, I suppose!" Thinking considerably more of the chase than of the classics, this accepting a testimonial to his intellectual worth seemed so like a sailing under false colors that he felt quite uncomfortable in consequence. Mr. Elsynge had no desire to be taken for an intellectual man—in fact, he would rather not; he encountered so many of them about, and daily mixed with people who knew so much, that he esteemed it an obvious virtue to know a little less than other people. "Learning is so cheap," said Mr. Elsynge, "it has become decidedly vulgar, and I resolutely decline to augment what little knowledge I unfortunately possess, and refuse to acquire any fresh information whatsoever, so convinced am I that ignorance is bliss, and that the people who know absolutely nothing are the real saviors of society." True, this had been said in the presence of the intellectual housekeeper, but it was really as close as could be to the genuine sentiments of this cross-country squire. "Then why," thought he, "should I, of all mortals on this teeming planet, have been selected for the infliction of a testimonial to intellectuality?"

However, his sideboard was to be converted into a shrine of Actæon, while the poor at their gates were sent on to the next town for relief.

"Again," thought the ingrate, "to give a man whose loves have been as many as his years a tribute to his moral worth is a caricature of virtue, very trying to a well-constituted and rightly balanced conscience." And here his thoughts wandered off again in the direction of the circus. "One can no more help having a passion for pretty girls than one can help having a passion for horses; in fact, they very often go together and mark the same quiet and gentlemanly taste."

Next morning—the morning of the important event—as though Mr. Elsynge was doomed to be tantalized, while riding down to Seaborough to the gunsmith's, the approach of a band of music warned him that the procession of the company was parading the principal streets of the town, and he held his mare in with a firm hand, for if she did not bolt at the sight of that Japanese contortionist she ought to. The cavalcade turned slowly into the High Street, one carriage containing the musicians, who all labored assiduously at waking the town up; then followed ladies in armor, and knights in various costumes of the nations, not always accurate but effective; retainers bearing banners, and pretty pages upon graceful ponies; chariots of war and chariots of peace, allegoric, florid, and decidedly chilling for those scantily clad ones posed upon the pedestals; obstinate little mules, whereon the jesters played such pranks the good people of Seaborough were much taken thereby, and errand-boys behind the sugar tubs and merchandise cases made their mind up to aspire for the laurels of the amphitheatre; then came a lady in a black velvet riding-habit, upon a highly trained steed, which pranced as though the road was of dirt, whereas it was of singularly noisy and uneven stone; and the procession finally terminated with a lofty car of some magnificence, as cars-processional go, a gilded and mirrored device upon which was a figure of a winged horse, pure white, and astride the horse a girl more Cupid than fairy, bearing bow and quiver; moreover, she was tastefully dressed in blue satin and silver; and as Mr. Elsynge caught sight of the pretty one thus elevated, he exclaimed, "Never saw any thing so lovely in my life!" He had reined in before the shop of Sticky, the grocer, and Uriah was in the balcony watering Tom Thumb geraniums; it was a darkly significant look Sticky sent to Mrs. Sticky, who was waiting to refill the water-pot, just within the little room above the shop.

Mr. Elsynge rode on, thinking what a charming companion the girl would be, when older, to accompany one to the hunt, the races, or the Park in town during the season. His yellow riding-gloved hand seemed all at once monstrously thick, while the thought of the waxen cheek and rose-bud mouth sent a thrill to his heart. It would be a joyous piece of fortune to be the possessor of so dainty a treasure. "Talk about a testimonial to a man's civil, moral, and intellectual worth; that's the sort of testimonial for me!" With which wicked remark to himself he arrived at his gunsmith's.

Mr. Elsynge went home to luncheon. Meantime at a preliminary meeting assembling at the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins there was a reactionary movement. In consequence of a circumstance communicated by their dear friend Sticky, public opinion was divided. Mr. Sticky had informed the meeting that Mr. Elsynge spent some hours on the preceding evening with the questionable females of the circus, and he had overheard him in the town that day openly express admiration for one of them, and Mr. Sticky feared the people were making a mistake; in his opinion, Elmore Elsynge, Esq., was not a fit and proper person to become the recipient of so splendid a testimonial. This was contested by Bacchus Bin (with whom the squire's account was large); he was well acquainted with Mr. Elsynge's love of horses, and he had probably gone behind to inspect them. As for expressing admiration for one member of the company, he (Bacchus Bin) had heard there *was* one at all events fully worthy of such admiration. At which Mr. Sticky was heard to pronounce the terrible word "Shechem," almost in the tone of a judgment, and there was an ominous calm; then Mr. Sticky, with righteous and virtuous emotion, said he felt conscientiously compelled to withdraw his subscription. Mr. Bin replied that since the subscriptions had poured in from rich and poor alike beyond all expectation, it would not seriously impoverish the fund if Mr. Sticky did withdraw it. The grocer left the house of Mr. Alderman Gubbins much hurt, and confident the prophet Ezekiel had flourished more particularly for this generation than for any other. Mr. Smelt, the fish-monger, was sorry a doubt had been cast upon the object of their interest, but if what his friend Mr. Sticky had said was true, it certainly altered the aspect of affairs—really it was more a question of esteem than of money. Bacchus Bin replied that some people were fonder of parting with their esteem than with their money, and a few were precious niggardly with both. Mr. Smelt said he had a suspicion all was not quite the thing, and that was why he did not press the Memorial Window. Mr. Bin answered that Elmore Elsynge, Esq., was one of the good old stock, and would, he was quite sure, decline the testimonial altogether if it came to his knowledge there were dissentient voices. Mr. Smelt kindly said he didn't want to cause painful confusion of that sort; he would be quite justified in adopting his friend Sticky's example and withdrawing his subscription. Mr. Bin was happy to say Mr. Smelt's contribution hadn't been melted down in the making of the magnificent piece of plate, then at the Town-hall, and he should feel much pleasure in moving that their respected treasurer, Mr. Simcox, return the said contribution there and then. This was done, and Mr. Smelt left the house of Alderman Gubbins much relieved; and he remarked in confidence to Mrs. Smelt that out of the seven thousand known species of fish, he thought Seaborough was especially noted for flats.

Mr. Vault, the stone-mason, here trespassed, as he called it, upon the attention of the assembly, and ventured an opinion that it was to some extent satisfactory that his proposition of the Obelisk had not been carried out, since all such imperishable monuments bearing record to the—

Here some commotion was caused by the huge black cat attached to the aldermanic establishment clawing its way up Mr. Vault's back, causing the speaker to wince with the pain and cease abruptly. The cat couchant upon Vault's shoulder glared with ghastly green eyes upon the meeting, one member of which, who was nervous in the matter of black cats, grumbled something about its being like a "death's-head," and was seized with a violent fit of coughing; then taking a grubby-looking, evil-smelling lozenge from his waistcoat pocket, he placed this in the aperture nearest the seat of trouble, and the noise was by degrees allayed. After this, Mr. Easel, the artist, begged to remind his friends that Mr. Elsynge was fond of painting, and if seen talking with some young member of the circus company, it was merely, no doubt, to arrange for some picturesque transfer in permanent pigments. An old gentleman, name unknown, who was taking snuff, here curtly muttered "Exactly," but the tone of voice was ironic and the gentleman's countenance so vindictive that the impression created was unfavorable. Then several commencing to talk at once, Mr. Silverside called to order. Mr. Silverside said he had heard the remarks of his respected fellow-townsmen with disgust and indignation; he had as great a regard for peace and order as any person, but he must say, and he thought the meeting would say with him, when he said that he must say there had been more than enough said about what there was nothing to say; and which, when said, amounted to nothing, say what they would, for what people said, he must say, was of little account if said prejudiced and bearing scandal upon the face of it; and if it was thought exception would be taken to the division of opinion, the presentation, in consequence, would be transferred to somebody else—which really was no business of any body's, the friends of the deceased having— Here it became but too evident the poor gentleman had lost himself again. Set straight, he proceeded to explain and make his meaning clearer, and wished to signify that the friends of Mr. Elsynge would have the gratification of knowing that he knew they had known of all they knew at that time, although then unknown to him, which, if he knew (and, of course, it was known he did not know), he would, knowing all then known to the meeting (which, of course, knew nothing of the kind), only have to—

Here Alderman Gubbins, with the cry of a watchman, uttered the warning numerals, "One—two! We have no time to lose; my friend Mr. Silverside has expressed my own sentiments exactly. I think the meeting may close; in an hour we shall re-assemble at the Town-hall; I have a note from Dr. Hunter saying he will be there to time; the platform has been tastefully decorated, we expect a large attendance, Amen!" The worthy alderman was an eminently religious man, as was well known, and was so used to family devotion in his household the benediction apostrophe slipped out in lieu of the adieu.

The account of the proceedings was repeated verbatim within half an hour to Mr. Elsynge by the same obliging informant as heretofore, and it served to increase the gentleman's distaste for this intrinsic piece of sham esteem.

However, he rode to the town, put his horse up, and walked into the Town-hall, was cheered, and conducted to the seat of honor in the front of the platform. Dr. Hunter immediately arose from the chair, and bowing to the gentleman, the audience, and the imposing, albeit slightly commercial, committee upon the platform, opened the proceedings by stating in a lucid, perspicuous manner the object of their assembling; and again the appreciative audience applauded, drowning the critical exclamation of a censorious rural dæmon, which bore an irreverent resemblance to "Gammon!" The proceedings were pursued without further indecorum, and Elmore Elsynge, Esq., quitted the Town-hall the proud possessor of the piece of plate. Carefully transported to his house, it was there placed upon a sideboard in the breakfast-room, and very handsome it looked, notwithstanding what Mr. Elsynge might think about it; but having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he naturally entertained less respect for this sort of thing than is customary with mortals whose birth does not partake of argentine favor.

In the evening the gentleman went alone to the circus; his patience was much tried, there was a tedious bill to sit out before his favorite appeared. Still, he endured the *ennui*, studied the flourish of foreign nomenclature on the programme, sat indifferent to the staring of a confident female upon his left, and forgave an old gentleman on the plank below, whom he happened to kick in the small of the back, and who turned round sharp and swore at him; having pocketed a cork, which a member of the sixpenny circle had so levelled from a ginger-beer bottle as to mark him, causing him to drop his gold-headed stick into the limbo beneath the planks whereon Messrs. Ringdom and Tanner's genteel patrons were supposed to sit enjoying themselves. After these varied experiences, the gentleman was not sorry to see the young performer ushered in with some ceremony by Mr. Ringdom himself, and looking prettier than ever in her fluttering petals of rose and white gauze. She then went through a series of such graceful evolutions that Mr. Elsynge's admiration of her lissom, fluent action and extreme beauty was much increased. He saw an unspoken poetry in her movements, a fire of enthusiasm in the splendid dash with which she went through the acts down for her performance, and, like most people in love, he saw wrongly: it was her desperate endeavor to conquer timidity; he might have seen, but for being blinded, an almost fierce fixedness of eye and set hardness of feature amounting to a look of horror when it came to leaping the paper-covered hoops, a trial of her strength as well as of her skill for which she was physically unequal. With daring that exhausted her she accomplished half the number of rounds apportioned to the scene, drew in her breath, gave a fawn-like spring, and came through covered with shreds of paper; panting, glowing, stooping again, and as though spending all her remaining strength and courage, giving a tremendous leap and cleaving it again, amidst the plaudits of the people; then breathlessly, more crimson upon the cheek, a dangerous light in the eye, and a frightened look that, as she came round and passed Mr. Elsynge, was plainly detected and stirred the blood in his veins, she crouched for one more bound, but her limbs felt clogged with lead, and she fell from the horse, and not until she lay outstretched and motionless did the crowd become conscious of an accident. Before those of the ring or audience had time to rush to her assistance, Mr. Elsynge sprang into the arena, and, kneeling down, lifted the slight and fragile form. Mr. Ringdom was by his side instantly, a cluster of sympathizers gathered round, among others Mr. Elsynge's groom, who having seen his master's movement joined him in the ring. "She is badly hurt," said Mr. Elsynge to the proprietor. "This will be a long and expensive affair; allow her to be taken to my house, where she shall receive every attention and care; my housekeeper will display a mother's tenderness toward her, and I will be answerable for the medical services." Mr. Ringdom reviewed the position in a trice; it was certain he would lose her services for a prolonged period, and to have the cost of surgical attendance and an apartment for her use the whole of the time staggered him, and he assented, expressing his obligation. Mr. Elsynge dispatched his man for the carriage; meanwhile the child, who lay insensible, had been carried gently to the dressing-tent, where the cool air revived her, and she opened her eyes, moaning piteously. "I know something of falls, Mr. Ringdom," said the squire, "and fear this is a serious one; but if she escaped the hoofs it may not be so bad as seems probable. Here is my card; yourself or Mrs. Ringdom will, of course, call and see our poor little sufferer whenever it is agreeable."

"In the name of Mrs. Ringdom, permit me to thank you, Sir. This kindness from a comparative stranger is overpowering to us. Believe me, we are not insensible to your patronage. We have had the honor of performing before most of the aristocracy of the kingdom; our efforts to please by high-class entertainment and superlative talent have been appreciated; we do not rely upon elephants, nor Arabs, nor worn-out drama, nor military spectacle, nor jockey acts and steeple-chasing, which the dimensions of the building don't admit of, but we provide individual talent of the highest excellence, and the most accomplished artistes money will engage. Mr. Tanner is not here to-day; we have another establishment, now located at Bath. Mr. Tanner is at Bath, but I will not fail to communicate to him your generous courtesy. Perhaps next time we have the honor to visit Seaborough you will permit us to announce the evening's entertainment as under the immediate patronage and in the presence of Elmore—Elmore" (looking close at the card) "Elsynge, Esq.?"

"Oh! with pleasure, Mr. Ringdom. Pardon me, I see my servant; we will have our patient borne tenderly, please, to the carriage."

A commotion in the circus compelled the proprietor to hasten thither. The audience refused to witness the Bounding Brothers until Mr. Ringdom had re-assured them as to the safety of their favorite. Mr. Ringdom, raising his white-gloved hand, signified his wish to address the audience. At first there was some hissing, but the proprietor waited with composure until silence was restored, when he spoke as follows:

"*Ladies and gentlemen,*—I ask the favor of your kind attention. The accident you have witnessed, and which no one deplores more than myself, is not unusual in an amphitheatre. [Hisses, and shouts of "No! no!"] But I say it is *not* unusual, and if any person present understands more about the management of the hippodrome than I do, let him come into the ring, and I'll walk out of it! [Cheers and applause.] Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your confidence. [State bow, natural to chiefs of the *manège.*] I have been travelling with one or more tented companies and studs for thirty-five years, and I have always met with the courtesy you extend to me to-day, and always without unseemly interruption." (Great confusion among the opposition, with hissing.) The Bounding Brothers brought in a tub, and the proprietor mounted it, and lifting his white-gloved hand, shouted, "If this continues, the performances will terminate abruptly. This establishment has been conducted in a respectable manner, and shall continue to be. [A lull.] Upon three previous occasions when we have visited your town our efforts to amuse have afforded general satisfaction, or we should not have come here again. Upon our next visit, I have authority for saying the evening's entertainment will be under the distinguished patronage of Elmore Elsynge, Esq. [Terrific cheers, and state bow again.] Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to assure you the young lady is not seriously injured, although she will not probably be able to return to her duties for some days. I have been requested to allow her to be removed in the care of a kind friend of influence and position present this evening, and I have consented. You will thus see I am not endeavoring to smuggle off a victimized body, as any one might suppose from your manifestation of feeling. Ladies and gentlemen, the performances will proceed without further interruption. Mr. George Turpin, Australian barebacked rider, will next have the honor of appearing."

Mr. Ringdom retired amidst continuous applause, the Bounding Brothers rolling the tub after him, and not looking particularly pleasant.

Meanwhile, upon the way home, Mr. Elsynge called upon Dr. Hunter, and took that patient professional gentleman with him. The doctor had always held to the opinion that if he waited with patience some stranger from distant parts might benefit by his skill, it being a matter of certainty that nothing would ever happen to the Sleperton and Seaborough people; and the lady who presided over the Elsynge housekeeping attended to the comfort of the poor sufferer, with many an ejaculation of tender sympathy and admiring interest. The doctor sat upon one side of the bed with grave solicitude, Mr. Elsynge upon the other, looking with anxiety toward Dr. Hunter for an opinion. The doctor assumed a profoundly learned and scientific air, appearing slightly troubled, while deeply impressed with the responsibility of the case. Dr. Hunter, as the leading practitioner of Seaborough, did not immediately offer an opinion; medical men of any eminence think a long time before speaking. Then Dr. Hunter said, "There is no cause for apprehension; these intermittent periods of semiconscious suffering will pass away. At present it is mere speculation to prophesy, but I think I may assure you that the issue will be favorable to the patient. To my mind her constitution is too fragile for any arduous exertion; perfect rest, absolute quietness, exclusion of irritants, such as tobacco smoke and oranges, which recall by pungency of their scent the atmosphere of the circus. A little brandy and water now, and some warmed milk later on, and the mixture that I will send to be taken about every three hours, and you will, by this time to-morrow evening, see a remarkable change for the better."

Fortunately nothing very serious had occurred, as Dr. Hunter knew perfectly well, merely a dizziness, faintness, and the shock to the system, consequent upon her fall; so, as the doctor said, rest and quiet, and the kind nursing of her new friends, would, all being well, go far toward restoring her to health.

In the morning Mr. and Mrs. Ringdom paid an early visit to their pupil, as they described her. Mr. Elsynge received them in the breakfast-room, and while Mrs. Ringdom accompanied the housekeeper to the bedside, an interesting transaction occurred down stairs. It arose in this way: The circus proprietor was attracted by the resplendent testimonial, with its massive horses in silver, and gentlemen of the chase in silver, the umbrageous silver foliage, and rippling stream over rocks of silver, and being a disciple of effect, was so struck by the *tout ensemble* of the entire arrangement, that he stood before it speechless, hands on hips, head first on one side and then on the other, and at last exclaimed, to the exceedingly amused owner, "This is a tableau of magnificence, Sir! A—tableau—of—magnificence!"

"Yes, it's a handsome piece, isn't it? Cost a lot of money, I believe."

"That I know it did: never saw any thing that took my fancy as this does." This Mr. Ringdom said with genuine sincerity, and since it was more horse than harp, it was very likely to be a pre-eminent attraction to his fancy.

And now an idea, bright as the testimonial, flashed upon the heir to Froggypond. With his accustomed coolness and indifference to consequences he seized his opportunity and said,

"I will treat you with open-hearted candor, Mr. Ringdom, and submit an exchange. I've taken a strong fancy to your pretty pupil, you've taken a strong fancy to my piece of plate. If you are content to leave her with me for good, she shall be well and honorably cared for, and you are welcome to yonder specimen of the silversmith's artistic workmanship." Having said which, the speaker sauntered indolently to the window, and poked at a gold-fish with his richly chased pencil-case.

Mr. Ringdom thought this one of those gold and silver jests gentlemen in society are addicted to when the humor takes them, and he remarked, "I think I should have the best of the exchange, Sir."

"Never mind; that's my look-out. If you're agreeable, say so, and sit down at the table and write out the transfer. I will send my servant round to your place for the agreement, or indentures, or whatever else binds this poor child to the life which, according to learned medical opinion, she is any thing but fitted for, and which she cordially hates, as I can gather from the painful moaning when she is unconscious."

Mr. Ringdom deliberated. He had no doubt whatever that she would escape at the first opportunity; he knew better than Mr. Elsynge how cordially she hated the life, and there was truth in the remark concerning her strength. Still, it is probable Mr. James Ringdom would never have yielded but for that glittering and costly exchange.

"Done!" he said, and sat down at the table and wrote out the contract. Mr. Elsynge, the more unmoved of the two, was nevertheless hugely delighted to have disposed of the testimonial to such profitable account, and his risible faculties were in a state of elation when he thought of what would be said by "our dear friend Sticky," and the dear friends of that dear friend. "They'll never invite me to wear the chain of office any more," thought the heir, with grim satisfaction.

Cross-purposes still. Here, in one part of the land, the Minister is pleading for this little mortal's future, while in another she is bartered for a piece of plate, and taken under the protection of a wealthy and, as it fortunately happened, honorable gentleman. What a tapestry is life! How interwoven the dark with the light! Thus far there was more of dark than light in this poor child's brief story, and a darkness made up of so much misery and grief as is not often endured in a young life; yet we are told that from disease the pearl is formed, and from the earth ariseth the lily. Some of the poems of the world have stood in calm, sweet power, no matter if without other poems to support and carry them onward with the help of companionship; there are living poems which neither time nor man, cross-purposes nor thwarted hopes, have any power to spoil. The plaintiveness of a soul sighing itself forth in music never was and never will be disregarded for all time: the song and sigh are twined a while, but not for long.

And what now will become of "Walter's" calm longing for union with her own? And what of the musings and dreamy ideals? She has had visions of valleys bathed in golden sunlight, and purple heights rising from clear water winding amidst the flowers as though to tie them with a silver thread into clustering groups; she has dreamed of a life passed in some blissful sphere where hardship and persecution are unknown; dreamed that she would one day discover that peaceful state. But the times are hard with her now; she is moaning with pain, blanched are her cheeks, her little mouth is more encircled with lilies than roses, and she has dread recollections of the late sorrowful time with her hard task-masters when her great mournful eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the tanned ring: that, and the faces of those about her, brown and unlovely; much as may some fair Israelitish girl of old have gazed wearily upon the tawny sand, when—

"It bare in it the ruts of chariot wheels,
Which erst had carried to their pagan prayers
The brown old Pharaohs."

Yet even as in Spain you hear children of the vineyards singing while they toil, hear bursts of song from out the groves upon the hills, until in the cool of even-tide the beautiful slopes are lyrical and resonant, and the passing traveller calls it the land of minstrelsy, so this little one's heart sang to her hard lot, and encouraged flagging hope, while her fancy had hung the dark days with pictures which cheered many a saddened hour.

Like a poem her life had once flashed into an hour's splendor, and had as quickly paled; there were brilliant glimmerings of hope for a little while, when it really seemed as if the intricate toils of her misfortunes were about to be broken through; but this accident appeared to have upset every thing, and to have revived all her perilous prospects.

Had Elmore Elsynge been hewn from the hardest of marbles, or cast in the most enduring of bronzes, he could scarcely have resisted the plaintive loveliness of this child. If he had admired her amidst late surroundings, he thought far more admiringly of her in helpless and touching dependence now upon himself. It was an exquisite feeling brought along with it. "If any thing in the world would make a good man of me, it is this. I will be a true gentleman and friend to her in every thought and word and deed." And herein Elmore Elsynge, Esq., proved, or promised to prove more than ever before, the legitimacy of his claim to the regard of his fellows on civil, moral, and intellectual grounds.

The course of our allegory presents a mosaic of singular contrasts, of widely opposite natures and fortunes; but this thwarting of the Minister's good schemes—Lena eloped with the "fast-looking young man," and "Walter" passed over to this gentleman of sport and pastime—would seem to be specimens of those freaks of destiny which do sometimes unaccountably controvert the best of purposes. "When in doubt, win the trick," says Hoyle; and without defending the course adopted by Mr. Elsynge, it may, at least, be attributed to the impetuous and impulsive decision that brooks no deliberation over a project. He was accustomed to instant resolution, and rarely hesitated in fulfilling his plans. With master-strokes a situation may be touched off in a few lines; leagues of landscape dwell in a poet's sentence; the acme of living, according to Mr. Elsynge's views, consisted in condensation and immediateness; the trouble of a pause, the worry of a wait, the weakness of indecision were all contrary to his ethics and opposed to his principles. "Lessons are in diamonds, which the more closely cut the more varied and brilliant are their phasis." Mr. Elsynge's emotions would never be aroused by the cunning charm of elegant utterance, but they were fully exercised by the poetry and pathos of this bird-like creature, with wings pinioned.

Mr. Elsynge was no lover of the luxurious creations of the French poets, stealing upon one like some gorgeous Watteau fantasie of by-gone days; nor of the bold and pleasant idyls of the German, laden with legend, and tuned to tradition; nor of the golden conceptions of the Italians, sumptuous with sun and fragrant of vineyards: it was some such Saxon poem as breaks upon one with flashes of sunshine in summer lanes, flushed with flowers, sweet with winds of woodland ways, and musical with trilling of birds, with humming of insects, with glad laughter of cotters' children. Moreover, he was to be captivated with stronger stuff than rose leaves, and bound with other fetters than blonde and brown threads of sheaved tresses. The perfume of his life was not the distilled essence of the boudoir, but the fresh, cool aroma of seas, the incense of garden reaches, the low bloom hovering in corridors of the dragonfly among the rush, the fragrance of dead forest leaves; and had he come upon some beautiful way-side child looking up at his mare with half-timid, half-wild admiration, he would have taken her up beside him for a canter over the heath, quite unruffled by any trouble of considering the thing beforehand, and all undisturbed as to the opinion of Uriah Sticky and his class. And this pretty wanderer and wayfarer—

> "Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on
> the cheek,"

charmed him as he had never been charmed before; she seemed to fill a vacancy long felt in his life, and to hold forth promise of companionship as freshly new as it was innocent.

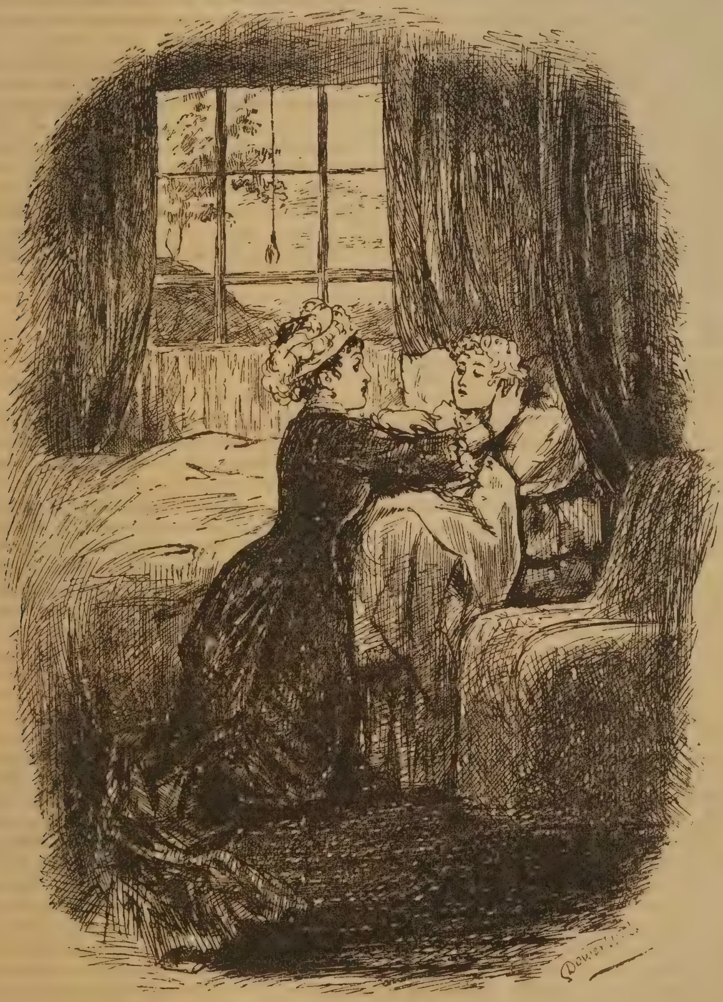
CHAPTER XL.

THE MINISTER'S GOOD WORK.

Mr. Garland's office of mediator and peacemaker did not stop with the good work done in Yorkshire; he was quite aware one must adjust both sides to produce uniformity, and immediately after leaving Cheffinger Abbey, he returned, as he promised, to Sleperton. Great were his mortification and sorrow upon hearing what had befallen "Walter," and to discover Lena had been taken away; it seemed to upset every thing, and counteract the efforts so perseveringly made with the hope of uniting the scattered family. Things often do wear this irritating and unhealthy-looking aspect, when, after all, they are but working in perplexity and shadow for good. He did not stop to be discouraged, but set to work. Nothing was to be gleaned from Mrs. Vincent beyond the comment, in her own very charming manner, that Lena would, she feared, come to some bad end. That young lady having certainly been taken off to a distance, and, as he believed, to Yorkshire, he turned his attention to the one remaining, taking Lady Helen into his confidence, and with every delicacy and tenderness disclosing that which moved the haughty lady to softer feeling and quivering sensibility, rendering her almost human. But even then, true to her character, she raised as an obstacle the life the child must have led in the unfortunate period preceding the accident. To take to her heart a little circus girl, albeit a lost daughter, was so exceedingly out of the course of family and polite experience that her ladyship revolted at the notion; but the indefatigable Minister, who hated this principle above all, discoursed with such sensible yet unoffending tact, and made so powerful an appeal to her feelings, that she consented to accompany him to the mansion of the man of many virtues, there to see the poor little sufferer. Mr. Garland believed the sight of this pretty defenseless one would prove a more powerful argument than any thing he could say. Elmore Elsynge, Esq., received his distinguished visitors with affable ease. It was only the day before that Mrs. Elsynge had expressed a hope, when talking with her grandson, that the owner of the Grange at Hawkingdean, then staying in Sleperton, would, upon some pretext or other, pay them a visit. Mrs. Elsynge had heard of the old moat (she kept a record of all the ancient dwellings where ponds, moats, or stagnant water of any considerable extent existed), and conceived the idea that the frogs fattening in its luxuriant preserves must be of a finer order, and worth ingrafting upon her own superb stock. Thus Mr. Garland was received with especial favor, and Mr. Elsynge was thinking to himself how best to persuade him into a similar visit to Froggypond, when the Minister introduced Lady Lindon and opened his business, upon which the heir at once began to look grave. It was an attempt to steal a march upon the treasure his country men and women had placed in his possession, and by all the laws of the Medes and Persians relating to testimonials he did not see it.

The speaker proceeded with caution; he explained satisfactorily, in confidence and as between gentlemen, that this young lady was the daughter of Lord and Lady Lindon, and entered with minuteness into the incidents connected with the treachery of the woman with whom their child had been placed. He dwelt upon her ladyship's feelings, and left it to Mr. Elsynge's gallantry and honor. Mr. Elsynge bluntly said he didn't see that his honor had much to do with it; but as his feelings were appealed to, Lady Lindon was at liberty to see her child, and as soon as she might be removed, to have her taken to the Manor-house. Mr. Elsynge did not expose his annoyance; he accepted the inevitable with the grace usually displayed by gentlemen of his position, and summoned his housekeeper to accompany Lady Lindon up stairs. Mr. Garland took up a book at his elbow; it was the *Frogs* of Aristophanes. "*A present to dear Elmore, on his birthday, from his affectionate Grandma.*" Mr. Elsynge, leaning against the door, asked the visitor if he played billiards. No, he did not play billiards. How did he think the weather was looking? He thought the weather promised very favorably. He believed Hawkingdean was an easy drive from Lewes; did Mr. Garland ever go to Lewes Races? No, Mr. Garland did not go to Lewes Races. At which point a neighbor made a morning call, to the great relief of Mr. Elsynge. A light luncheon was served, the Minister taking a glass of Burgundy with much pleasure, for he was exhausted; he did not become impatient—he believed an affecting interview was taking place above—but he became weary of the conversation of the two gentlemen upon horses, dogs, matches, engagements, and sport generally, then upon French actresses, Italian singers, Spanish dancers, and other foreign matter.

And up stairs the stately lady was overcome by that sweet, patient face, engraved upon her heart from often looking at the picture where it was copied with exquisite truth to life. Affected to tears at thus meeting her little one lost for so long, she could but kneel by the bed, her white hand trifling with those short boy-curls, her diamonds sparkling through the net-work of blonde silk; so different to the cold, repelling, and imperious lady-mother in the long ago of dreamy memory; so different, that "Walter" rested blissfully, almost afraid to break the spell and bring back the haughty empress of her earlier years. At last she timidly asked, "And you are really my own dear mamma? And you are going to love me, and take me to live with you? Tell me so; it makes me feel well and most happy."



"HER WHITE HAND TRIFLING WITH THOSE SHORT BOY-CURLS."

"It is true, my dear, as soon as it may please God to make you well, when the removal will not harm you."

Then, very content, the little one smiled, thinking how soon she would get well. But Lady Lindon was seriously alarmed for her restored one, and was unwilling to leave her, and later on in her chamber at the Manor-house realized Madame De Staël's words, "Oh, what would become of a mother, trembling for the life of her child, if it were not for prayer!" In the solemn night-time the thought of that patient face kept her company, and she saw her child still, chaste with the shapely symmetry of one that lives in marble, with that light on the brow that is born of the soul. Can any interpret the difficult and beautiful tenderness which is a blended rhythm of love and regret? Devotion is blazoned on the shield of history, and heroism lives upon its page, but who chronicles regret or takes measure of remorse? The bard would harp forever over heroics and lovers, but regret hath no time, and its resonance is but a weary echo. What *trouvère* hath ever sung the lyric of a love clasped in a fixed regret? There is love that suffers and is strong, that esteems coronets and crowns as toys, that lives and dies its own monument, God and the angels its witness; and there is love that is not denying, that is haughtily cold, fed of the ashes of some grim past, the ideal of desolate sovereignty. And when this sensitive lady thought of that daughter lying in the house of a stranger who had paid a price for her ransom from bondage—

"With childhood's starry graces lingering yet
I' the rosy orient of young womanhood;
And eyes like woodland violets newly wet;
And lips that left their meaning in her blood!"

she truly realized the bitterness of a great humiliation. Holding up the light the better to look upon the portrait in her chamber, it seemed that she detected greater loveliness than she had ever done before; that glimpse of the face in life lent soft toning, and recollection weaving its charm about this picture, she told herself never such beauty had met her gaze before. So she grew to be proud of it, and to be proud of it was a distinct advance on her favor. That too highly strung instrument, her heart, was vibrating, a sweeter melody awaking from slumber on its strings; she was trembling and surely womanly. She placed the light down before the picture among *cristalleries* of Clichy and Baccarat, and she went to the table, where those simple treasures, brought to her of old by tiny hands, were more silently eloquent than ever, and she was lost in thought; back to a time when a vision now and then crossed her fancy of what might be—a handsome, dark-eyed son, with wild curls clustered where she would long in future days to see the circle of laurel, ancient wisdom and the undying poetry of Athens his honor and delight. It had passed, and she had not taken to the girl instead; her proud desire was thwarted, and she never forgot; but now the dreamy, still-faced girl, with the pensive light in her large eyes, and quiet calm on the brow where a glory seemed to fall through the pale golden hair, this girl bade fair to woo infinite tenderness, win great love. Lady Lindon, like others with whom the child came in contact, *could not* remain insensible to that nameless charm which won the interest and sympathy of all.

Conflicting emotions were certainly breaking down that barrier of cold and proud exclusiveness which she had raised between herself and others. The communication made by Mr. Garland moved her as nothing had ever done before. To realize herself in company with her children—no longer alone—with something to live for—possibly loved, although she doubted much whether ever forgiven—all this presented such strange and unthought-of possibilities, and was so consummate a fulfillment of the yearning experienced throughout, that she was shaken as women are when confronted by tremendous and imminent issues for good or for bad. This was for good; undeserving, guilty but penitent, she was yet to be made happy, and the consciousness of this helped to subdue her defiant reserve. It was no sudden change: the breaking up of ice is a gradual process; and so it was with this woman lately so strong, Roman-voiced, stately, proud. When majestic and powerful, one could not approach nearer than the lowest step of her dais, dazzled by the glitter of her gems and great flood of gold, looking in vain for one little point of tender blue for relief from the blaze of splendor—all the anguish of unrelieved color, the clash of a might of music, and not one small cool pearl, one soft low note. Now it is different; the blue and the pearl the lower note, and a broken pride that is a loftier grace. Already meditation has become a happiness:

"Thoughts that poets fling upon
The strand of life, as drift-weed after storms,"

are grouping and gathering together beautifully. Anon her soul will revel in those quiet yet intense joys of motherhood, in the true perfection of which the isolation through pride becomes impossible.

The splendor of her house palls upon her now, so do aspects change. It is gorgeous with cunning of rare color, and grand with the glow of great lands of the East, but she almost sighs for more simplicity, and some quieter hues, shadowy and calm. Our inner self is so in or out of harmony with its surroundings, the thrilled soul is influenced instantly by color, or its absence, to agitate and wound or to depress. The era of the cactus had passed, the time had come when

"Doves made sweet moaning, and the guelder-rose
In a great stillness dropp'd, and ever dropp'd,
Her wealth about her feet."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MAJESTY OF FORGIVENESS.

While the train of incidents described was passing in one place, equally as interesting an understanding was being brought about elsewhere. Willie Arden, upon arriving at home with his precious charge, accompanied by her faithful maid, although strongly tempted to invite her to be the guest of his father, was yet so nice upon points of etiquette that he preferred to take her on at once to St. Aubyn. They reached the House upon the Cliff not long after the departure of the Minister, and found her guardian, if not exactly prepared for the meeting, less obdurate. The return, in fact, was well-timed; had it been left until the morning, as Mr. Willie was at first tempted, events might have resulted differently. The recluse was pleased to see good Martha Saxe in attendance, and to know the unbroken journey had been taken straight to himself. And had not views, possibilities, and passions been forcibly turned from their still, deep channel! Ay, she might come back now and welcome. It would afford opportunity for the performance of that upon which the mediator had so strongly and, as it seemed to his lordship, so mercilessly set his heart. Lady Lindon yearned for the recovery of her children, and to be told by his own lips that she was forgiven; she should be told so, and the pledge should be his taking her child, and himself uniting them. "My ancestors could not have done more," he murmured; then added, bitterly, "and forgetful of the past and of myself, Helen and Lena will be happy, very happy." But he did not sufficiently fathom the nature of either: they would not forget.

But oh, he was not half cured yet; the sight of her recalled so much, revived such happy memories. Time might tone down the rebellion, would do so, but while it lasted he suffered. Yet he did not fail in courtesy, and with a grace singularly his own thanked the young man kindly. If any thing could make up to him for any aggrieved feeling he might harbor, it should have been the child's fervor of love and gratitude upon being received again. Lena was indeed joyous beyond measure, and, as she said to him, had come back loving him as never before. That slightly clouded the young man's brow, and did not lift any particular cloud from St. Aubyn's, but he could not help feeling the sincerity that prompted the assurance, and there is much in sincerity even under the most untoward circumstances.

"I shall be pleased if you will remain our guest this evening, Mr. Arden."

How magnanimous he could be now that the splendid illusion had vanished, and that to which he had clung failed to sustain him!

His nature was not like the common natures of the world; isolation had fostered the idealism of the love that had atoned for the terrible grief of earlier years, and the passion had been one for which there is no measurement. And now the loss was so utter, so tremendous in its complete destruction and shattering of the tender fragile fabric, he could dispassionately extend hospitality to the young man who had in that happy past caused him many a pang, could calmly anticipate the double anguish of an interview with his wife, and the yielding to her of this long priceless treasure.

And if an evening's unalloyed pleasure was a reward for constancy in memory and chivalry in conduct, then was Willie Arden abundantly rewarded, for he passed, as he told himself when looking in the toilet-glass afterward, the very happiest evening of his life. Miss Lena's adventures, while sobering her a little, and inducing a thoughtfulness that sat very charmingly, had not despoiled her of those innocent, guileless, kitten-like ways and movements that were of themselves so fresh and attractive; and while every old fascination was thus brought up before St. Aubyn with a vividness that blanched his cheek by its agony, it, on the other hand, flushed the cheek of Willie Arden with the warmest glow delight ever lends. It was an evening both he and the girl looked back upon: a link connecting the dawn of love with its meridian.

A few nights after this—time of the border-line between spring and summer—when the world was fresh with renewed beauty, and the bloom was vivid with an outburst of delicate color and sweet with reviving clouds of delicate fragrance; on an evening toward the end of May, warm, balmy, odorous, the country seeming to welcome unto herself by every blandishment and wooing charm, pleasing to the several senses, the land outspread with an array impressive to the dullest soul—singing birds, flowering plants, elegant foliage, an aroma perceptible at no other season of the year; clear, dazzling, blue and white above; gambolling, leaping, skipping, frisking of animals and children; soft music and song, and tender minstrelsy every where; graceful play of insects in the mellow air; slant beams of gold touching up the old masonry of the Manor-house until it resembled some cunning painting, the last flood of glorious light bathing all the garden until it presented a Watteau-like surrounding to the mansion, and on the quaint, red-bricked village; flowers every where, and the village green new carpeted with a brighter turf, whereon stood the Lord of the Manor, returned and contemplating the fair scene with mingled feelings of pain and gladness. With him Lena, and as the sunbeams fell upon her blown and careless hair, and the ruby tint in the sky seemed to centre in a glow upon her cheek, he, looking upon her and upon the spring-time spectacle, was moved with emotion, and, taking her hand, walked more quickly toward his home.

A man came from among the trees, near the house; it was Reuben Smith, the bailiff. He removed his hat and stood with profound respect before his lordship.

"Good-evening, Master Smith; I am glad to find you looking well, and the old place seems homelike after all."

"My duty to your lordship, and thank ye, I'm well an' hearty; and the place ain't changed this ten year, as you see. I've done by you as though to give account at any minute you might come home. Some o' th' neighbors is contrary, and the mill ain't what it was. If there's corn there's no wind, and if there's wind there's no corn, and it's hard grinding a livin' out of it all; but, thanks to your lordship, I've had the farms to look to, and it's kept things going somehow or other."

"And the tenants—all well, I hope?"

"All on 'em, not one have ailed a day sin' your lordship's bin gone."

"I am glad to hear it. Health, Master Smith (next to peace of mind), is the greatest of all blessings."

"Grist to the mill, some says, but I don't know but your lordship is right! Very doubtful whether the peace o' mind will come to any body in this world, though!" Reuben moodily went on his way, while the Lord of the Manor stood by the great gates looking back on the village. One and another of the cottagers standing by their garden railing looked wonderingly across the Green, hardly certain whether their eyes deceived them, or whether it was indeed the long-absent lord; and from one and another the strange news spread, and they thought the world was approaching its end surely, wonders were so many.

He passed through the great gates into the garden, and they saw no more of him that evening.

He made no commotion by knocking at doors and ringing bells, but walked in quietly, unannounced. He knew well the apartment which was wont to be the favorite with his wife, and, leaving Lena in the library, went to it with a firmness and heroism full of dignity. She was there, in the midst of her barbaric splendor, imperial as of old, girt strangely with subtle color, low upon luxuriant cushions—a long stretch of the skins of mighty beasts; broad columns flanked with malachite, chased and locked with gold. Lion basins, Pompeian, bronze, and gold, filled with scented waters or beautiful flowers; tawny magnificence that might have been the glory of enchanted halls of the Libyan desert; carven plinths where the lotus—emblem of beauty—seemed the presiding floral symbol whether in wood or stone; here and there curious characters Oriental, flashing some snatch from Eastern poems, talismanic, mystic as are those on the reputed cimeter of Solomon. Gleaming birds secured by silver chains fluttered among pomegranate-trees growing in great jars by the window; ornamental boxes glowing with the golden Persian lily; marble tanks wherein gold-fish, which she daintily sported with after the method of the Empress of Jehan-Guire, who encircled her favorites with fillets of gold. Suspended from the ceiling were weighty curtains of snowy velvet, lined with an exquisite ruby silk, looped by thick cord of gold; at intervals were long white tassels, seen but in the Indies, made of the hair taken from the tails of white oxen in Scinde: to each tassel was attached a tinkling bell of gold, and the fluttering of the birds or the soft air coming from the garden through the open window kept these in continual motion. Upon pedestals were contrivances of amber, innocent conceits deftly shaped by swarthy beauties, who in their land sing that amber is a concretion of the tears of birds; alabaster flagons gorgeous with the blood-red amaranth, in line, at intervals, so placed as to relieve the tawny overweight of brown and yellow splendor; lower than these, and circling them, in symmetrical alabaster vases, were Cashmere roses of astonishing color and rare odor; over the floor was outspread a dense purple thick pile carpet; at uniform distances were snowy rugs, every rug being bordered with massive fringe of gold and lined with amber silk. A circular richly chased ewer of colored marble was stationed in the centre of the apartment, and was a receptacle for the lotus, whose red blossom seemed to sovereign the rivalry around; lower than this and encircling it were lesser ewers of corresponding design, wherein the blue lotus lent much-needed relief; lower yet than these, lying upon the clear water of a white marble bath surrounding the whole, there were blue water-lilies; their grateful hue in conjunction with the pellucid depth assisted the relief. Drinking at this pool was a pet goat of Tibet, its collar incrusted with gems; by its side was a pile of purple cushions; upon them reclined a girl of surprising loveliness, who attracted his lordship's attention immediately. A book, a portfolio of engravings, a lute and mandolin, and fanciful needle-work were around her, and a truly pretty picture with this romantic surrounding was presented. Lady Lindon arose with much sad majesty and a deadly calmness that moved him to the soul. Mr. Garland had in some degree prepared her for this; but all the preparation in the world would not nerve her for thus looking upon his face, so worn, so handsome still, so livid with agony of the moment. He took her hands with a kind, forgiving, considerate manner that assured her of his desire to convey how completely he absolved her. Wistfully looking into his grand face; courting the eyes whose eloquence she had never cared to fathom—for the glance of pardon that might perchance give promise of a full forgiveness; hanging, as it were, upon the very grasp of the hands holding hers during that first firm, unshaken greeting; seeming to live ages in the brief suspense between that movement and the word; gleaming with her embroidery of topaz, gems, and gold; queen-like in raiment of queens, haughty yet, but with it all, sad, yearning, quivering; allowing herself to be slowly guided thence, walking as a queen might walk from her throne to some quiet chamber, where she would confront time and eternity and lay aside her majesty, becoming very woman in penitence and supreme humility. He could not talk amidst that splendor, but led her to the duskier room where her portrait, painted long since in the days of his belief, hung above the chimney-piece.

"A few unreserved words, Helen: there should be no witness to our understanding—reconciliation if you will—save One who witnessed the solemnity of the compact and of my truth when I took you to be my wife." She bowed her head; then, with faint utterance, said,

"You use the word 'reconciliation;' it is your supreme pity which dictates its use. You know there is heinous crime and sin upon one side, and aggrieved honor, poisoned faith, upon the other. I shrink not from a plain statement of the position; I have had plainly to state it so often to myself. No; reconciliation may follow. Now it is pardon."

"And you are pardoned, Helen. I come purposely to tell you so."

The assurance confirmed the hope his generous clasp of the hand had thrilled her with. For a moment she became faint, and leaned tremblingly to the wall, where once he too had rested in sore pain; and he suffered now, she was so sadly beautiful, and he thought of what might have been. But there was no love left; its very embers were quenched.

He gently took her hand, leading her from that stricken posture, supporting her with firmness in which there was no shadow of trembling: so to a chair by the window; a tiny gleam of red from the setting sun stole upon its back, where the carved and painted shield of a long unsullied line seemed to blind him. His mother had often sat in that same place, talking of the glory of a spotless ancestry, of the crowning reward of all chivalry—a faithful consort, one to add fresh lustre to the honor, one to join the traditions of stateliness and grace. It caused him to wince with sharp and sudden pain, and for an instant he doubted the reality of his destiny, it seemed so cruel.

He stood beside her; she leaned an elbow on the table and her brow fell to her shapely hand, and far outspread in line with her was the sweep of splendid robing. He would not look upon that queenliness, upon those fair proportions, saw alone the sorrowful face downcast, the attitude of resigned repentance; and he spoke very tenderly, so tenderly it set her quivering, and it seemed harder to bear than reproaches.

"One solemn moment of our lives, dear Helen, was when you left me, taking our child; another, now, when I return to you, bringing your child, *not mine!* There is no special God to try the causes and results of such solemn moments; it is the Providence who smiled upon our union and would have blessed it. In His grieved sight today I stand in the old home, very dear to me, Helen, and most for those who have gone before; but I shall revisit the hallowed spot no more. I have lived dead to you and to the world, and shall still live on, unknown, unknowing, only a bitter memory left to me: isolated; the fierce elements—kinder far than my race—for sole companionship; eyried as eagles eyrie—face to eternity, fed of the furious storms, aloof from all gentle things, and enthroned above wreckage, turmoil, and the strife of tempests. I have come to look upon this face again once more [raising it, drenched with her tears, so softly she could not resist]; so sad a face, it will haunt me there; but I brought some of our northern sunshine with me [here his voice trembled] to restore the smiles that were ever too few upon so royal a face; and with your children, longed-for, I am told, great happiness may yet be yours. My pardon I brought in person, that heard from my lips you might rest content with, feeling its depth of sincere good-will. I have brought no ill-feeling here with me to-day, shall carry none hence; and if I know that you are happier for this, that life and love finds all it needs in intercourse with those restored to you to-day, I shall be content. I may say, since I speak as one who will be heard no more, that greater content will be mine than if I knew you returned to society, whose sovereign you rightfully were, but are no longer. We shall live distinct, retired lives, but neither need be profitless; your children; my—my books, and art, and the what-not wherewith the lonely edify themselves. Ghosts of old memories will sometimes trouble me, but I will lay these, God helping me, in giving aid to those beaten, battered ones, bruised by storms and rocks. You and the delicate twain will think of me at such times, and I will think of you and them."

She could not bear much more, and when the proud sad tone had ceased and there was silence in the room, she was confronted by all he had said, rising stark and weird before her, remembered every word, vivid and fire-like, and her eyes were hot, tears dried; she could no longer weep, but with wistful agony looked up, taking his hand, feeling the palm throbbing like her own heart.

"You shall not go from here," she said. "It is your home, not mine; and if you will permit it, my children shall accompany me to Darrell Abbey."

"No; remain where you are, or go whither you will; I shall return to the seclusion of my out-of-the-world retreat."

"Do you know that I was told you were dead?" asked with pathetic quivering of the lip.

"Yes; I told you myself. It is the truth."

She shook her head.

"And I mourned as widows mourn for dead husbands, loving them. I mourned as though there had been no shadow from the altar to the grave."

He only bowed; the mourning for one's death is so little consolation.

"Let us join the girls," he said, abruptly, for he was beginning to feel too much at home, and it would not do.

They found them like doves, nestling and cooing away as though there were neither world nor mortal beyond their Pompeian chamber. Lena, used to petting goats with other creatures, divided her caresses between the gemmed beauty from Tibet and her sunny-curled half-sister. Life promised henceforth to be a happy dream for the pretty pair, and perhaps in the opinion of both they had been so very much awake of late they might well afford to dream a while.

Lord Lindon's emotion became more marked upon thus discovering so exquisite a picture. He went to the window; it was the twilight of distant woods in view beyond the garden—the dear old garden of his boyhood—it seemed softened, while the lowered hues lent dim misty beauty, like some lone isle of fairy world revisited in dreams. The circle of lights beyond the Green just glimmered here and there between the trees. It was all so peaceful, and some bird's vesper stole down on it with so sweet a benediction, he asked why man's heart should be thus distracted when all the world seemed hushed and still. He heard quick breathing beside him, and, looking round, saw his daughter, come with her winning confidence to tell of her heart's long love for her lost papa; and he sat in the window, with her by him, looking on the young face, learning it. Beautiful language was writ thereon, such as suffering —which purity and delicacy refines, not makes gross—leaves the imprint of while adding one other charm. She stood at his knee, child-like and wooingly; the action made his heart bleed, for it recalled the similar attitude by another, so often a fond delight; at the same time, somehow, this tended to heal, there was so grave a sweetness about it, such tender thought; it sank into his wounded heart, it bore full sympathy and feeling, it was fragrant with love treasured and growing up to the finest passion ever moving a human heart. Gently he wooed the story of her known to you, and heard how, while his flown bird was winging her flight from him, this poor toiler plodded on hopefully toward himself, cherishing a dim pictured ideal of him she sought, who, when found, was to be all in all to her, and it moved him mightily, it was so redolent of loving simplicity and devotion.

"And you have been praying to find me some day?" he asked, softly. "Have looked to it as the end of all the wanderings?"

She gazed into his eyes lovingly, looked the answer with never a word, and he laid a hand lightly on the clustering boy-curls, idling thoughtfully with them, they were so unlike the tresses with which he had been wont to play. And Lena, nestling by her mother, saw the action with singular emotion, but neither spoke. Her ladyship was too unstrung by the recent ordeal to display the interest thrilling her; she remained very quiet a while until composed, straining to catch his low-breathed utterance, striving to intercept but one fond glance bestowed upon his child, and her heart sank to witness the warmer attention she gave to him. There had been no such smiles as those for her; when the girl's eyes had met her own, there had not shone upon her the rays of love making his face look lighter and happier than she had yet seen it, and Lady Lindon felt even grateful for that close nestling to her of the other.

Confidingly as a boy or girl stands at one's knee to unburden the heart of its sorrow she stood by him, piteous, beautiful. "Would I had known of this!" he said, much affected. "How much we are indebted to our friend the Minister!"

"Perhaps I might never have seen either you or mamma had it not been for him."

"And now you are going to settle down quietly and make up for all, in this old home?"

"No!" Her eyes were open wide with awakened enthusiasm at the new plan in view, and his heart was thrilled when she hurriedly continued, "Lena and I have been talking; she has told me all of her story not told to me before, and cried when thinking how lonely you would be. 'If papa will have you, dear, do you go back with him,' she said to me; 'try to console him for the loss of myself, and love him as I have loved him, still love him! Your sweet ways and gentleness will charm him, and in time—in time he will be as happy with you as he used to be with me; more so, for I was always unruly and a source of anxiety.'"

The recluse turned his head away, his whole frame was shaken, the solicitude of his late treasure and the recollection of old times affected him terribly. But the thoughtfulness of Lena, extravagant as the project seemed to him, offered release from the utter loneliness his isolation entailed. And his heart was warming fast to this fragile, gentle creature, for whom he had so grieved when stolen from him in her early childhood. In the sadly beautiful face that so impressed every one, he met the lineaments of a race distinguished for beauty; those sensitive nostrils almost breathed upon Lely's canvases in the gallery, the eyes were the eyes of his stately mother living again to comfort him.

"But I may not take you from your mother's care; think of her as well as of me."

"I am afraid I am thinking of myself most of all. I shall be happier with you. I have learned to be very candid," she added, with a faint smile; and then, with a burst of confidence, "You can not think how I dreaded lest, when I discovered my father, I should find also that another filled his heart. I had a sort of vague presentiment of this; but now it seems there will yet be room for me—that I shall come in, after all."

"But how will you like a nest cradled high upon wild crags, with furious winds only for lullaby?"

"I have had none other," she answered, slowly, pale at the recollection.

"How like the monotony of so uneventful an existence?"

"It is what I have longed for; quiet, and peace, and rest."

"No fresh faces to please and distract attention?"

"One—yours—is all-sufficient; and I shall love it so." This was said with passionate ardor, indicating both the sincerity and how intensely it had been longed for.

"Then you shall come." And with his arm re-assuringly around her, he drew her close to him with the half-convulsive movement so significant of suffering. When near to that heart the child knew a joy the like of which she had never known before.

Shades deepening without warned him it was time to depart if he would quit Seaborough by the evening train, and this for manifold reasons he preferred doing.

"We have been engaging in an innocent compact," he said, quietly, walking toward Lady Lindon hand in hand with his daughter.

"I can guess it," she said, rising, "and my selfish feelings may not impair an arrangement that will be productive of much happiness."

"Thank you; our girl shall visit you and Lena at intervals." And that concession she thought gracious and full of feeling. "If you can spare her now, it will save the necessity of my returning here; it is unwise to give the people food for talk." This brought it very close; it seemed more than she could assent to, so soon to part with her, but she suppressed all outward emotion, and slightly bowed acquiescence, clinging to that promise of his. More spontaneous and unfettered was the remonstrance of Lena and Helen; clasped hands, tearful eyes, and caresses told of how they saddened; and then Lena thought also of him, and checked the sorrow, cheerfully looking to their future meeting.

With an adieu of calm, unruffled firmness, Lord Lindon took leave of her ladyship; the farewell of Lena was also gone through with, by which time the firmness had given way, and dejected he quitted the well-loved home, looking back on it with moist eyes, and clasping hard the little hand in his.

Then they set their faces northward. Companions these thenceforth.

She had looked for this; it was what would have been had she not in earlier days met with that hard fate. So they comforted one another.

CHAPTER XLII.

WITH VISORS DOWN.

The Minister's study: the Grange: Night. Mr. Garland writing; his looks troubled and care-worn. A death-like stillness, all of the household having retired to rest. There is that sullen, mysterious hush which forebodes coming ill, when we are unable to account for the weighing down of the spirits, and receive warning of imminent peril. But the Minister's face had never been graver and more thoughtfully majestic than on this night, alone in his study, calm, composed, prepared for battle. It was known to him that he had the World, hitherto at his feet, arrayed against him in bitter warfare; the Flesh, for which he had so often sacrificed himself, had revealed itself his perjured ally; the Devil, with whom he had struggled until faint, was become the marshaller of forces of stupendous influence, to blast his character and reputation. One against legions; no wonder he looked grave, was solemnly in earnest!

He knew himself to be toppling upon the pedestal; that the lies set floating were in the current of common talk; the grand unsullied ministry the garment for vulgar soiling; his lofty life the subject for ribald insult; his self-denying devotion held up as hypocrisy. He knew it. Members leaving the church, absence of communicants, coolness of the office-bearers, turning away of friends, pointing of the public, significant removal of his books from the shop windows of the town, respectful intimation from his Brighton housekeeper of her wish to resign her duties, and cancelling of an engagement to lecture. Ay, it is soon done; yet thus far it was but rumor—a brave defiance, a challenge daring and heroic as any attributed to the classical champions of Christendom—and honor might be saved. He was not fighting in the dark; he knew his foes, and verily they were powerful, that threefold combination. But he was neither intimidated nor overwhelmed, for, after all, he felt that he had been waging war with Hydra from the beginning. A man of this stamp, who could enter so fearlessly upon the most open and exposed of all public relationships with a mighty and tenacious purpose at heart, would not abandon the field, though scarred by many wounds, nor ever yield but with his life.

"It has hitherto been a contest, Mr. Barnard, at a safe distance. You have brought it close; perhaps it is as well, we shall finish it the sooner." He spoke aloud, his hand upon his brow, his face bowed low. The speech was answered. The time for which his enemy had waited had arrived. Having entered unheard, by way of the moat and secret passage, he had been contemplating the Minister with folded arms, haughty, determined.

"The sooner—this night!"

The Minister turned a degree colder. Looking wearily up—

"This is something fresh. Intrusion into my very house and private apartment."

"I have not the word 'Privacy' written on my notes, Lionel Travers, where you are concerned. The intimacy between us is too delicate to admit of any such barrier."

"Nay, but God forbid there should be any intimacy between us, Sir! Our paths lie distinct and wide apart."

Both were collected, and both were coldly courteous.

"They cross to-night! I've a little outstanding account, which, if you please, we'll settle up."

Impatiently indicating a chair, the Minister laid down his pen with characteristic precision. "I am ready to hear any thing you have to say, Sir."

"You probably imagined, until seeing me that day in the chemist's shop, that I was conveniently absent in another hemisphere, or elsewhere?"

"I thought it more likely you were safely in the hands of the police."

Mr. Barnard bowed. "Disdainful as of old, Sir. Your clerical life has not sweetened your disposition."

"Toward you, no! The minister is yet a man, and by his manhood loathes the villainous miscreant now in his presence."

"Steady does it, reverend Sir, or by jingo you'll make me speak my mind!"

"Do so. If truthfully, it will be the first time in your life."

Mr. Barnard looked at his antagonist with leisurely admiration.

"You'll die fighting."

"I shall die at my post."

"A defensive one just now, eh, Mr. Westley Garland?"

"Always a defensive one; it is the stationary position of a minister of the Gospel."

"Or the minister of any thing else, I take it. I've been in a state of siege and defense all my life. But allow me to explain the purport of my trip to Hawkingdean. Business, Sir! I'm all business! You have, no doubt, been surprised and gratified that there has been no attempt at interference with you in your present avocation? Don't interrupt me; because you have, any man would. I credit you with the common feelings of humanity, notwithstanding your late exalted position: observe the 'late'—it exists no longer, or won't tomorrow if we don't come to terms, for your hold upon the *ecclesiastici* is ticklish, Sir, or I'm no miserable sinner. Your progress has been watched with keen interest by those of your friends who, standing aloof from you, have sympathized with your indefatigable perseverance in amassing treasure. I do assure you upon this matter we are in accord. This is the business I have come upon, to negotiate with a man of substance, Sir—a man of substance. I sojourn at the leading hostelry of this charming village. To simplify matters, you will hand over to me and the firm I have the honor to represent all moneys standing to your account in the Brighton and London banks; you will then be at liberty to accept a curacy under one of our estimable colonial Bishops, or—and this I commend to your notice in consequence of your success among the heathen at home—as a missionary. With your enterprise you would do a large amount of good among the blacks."

"I have heard you out, Sir—"

"No; I have not finished yet, but pray go on with what you were about to say."

"I do not know where your rapacity will end."

"With—your—all."

"I should have thought the extent of my sufferings—the utter wreck of myself and home, the loss of every farthing, of honor, of my dear wife and child—would have satisfied even you."

"Excuse me; there you run on a false track. I am not despotic, nor of the school. The majority of persons, indeed, vote me an exceedingly pleasant person for a man of business; the impending transaction with yourself is purely a matter of business."

"There is no transaction pending with me, Sir, nor is there likely to be. Your extortionate demand will be forgotten directly your odious presence is withdrawn."

"'Hard words break no bones,' as my grandmother said to me when she gave me a severe thrashing after swearing at me for an hour. You are, of course, aware of the ugly things the good people are saying of you. I can't tell whether true or false, but I do know human nature to be singularly frail. If, however, you've done all they say about you, all *I* can say is that you're an out-and-outer. Under these circumstances, a word I have it in my power to speak will settle Westley Garland, the sometime popular preacher, forever. I have but to declare that he has been living and preaching under an assumed name, and to expose the antecedents of this twofold person, in order to lead to his uncommonly rapid exit. It is on the card that I do this, failing your compliance with the delicate request before named. I rely upon your good sense to avert this contingency."

"Which it will not, Sir. You are at liberty to publish any thing concerning myself that you please; such threats carry no weight. Indeed, that you should threaten at all is a matter of perfect indifference. I believe the English people regard a man's work before his name, and so long as he be known as *Christian*, that surname is sufficient warranty for their esteem. As to the rest, I am not sure but Lionel Travers will gain as many sympathizing friends as does his better self. Names are but husks, that drop off and grow again, renewing their little day according to the part we play. My reputation can be safely left to take care of itself; if worthy at all, slander will not hurt it."

How oppressively silent the room seemed between the intervals of their talking!

"Anticipating some such indifference to public opinion—a great mistake where a man holds the future in the hollow of his hand—I have taken steps to submit another argument, one that will carry greater weight. Your child is in my power, and in safe-keeping."

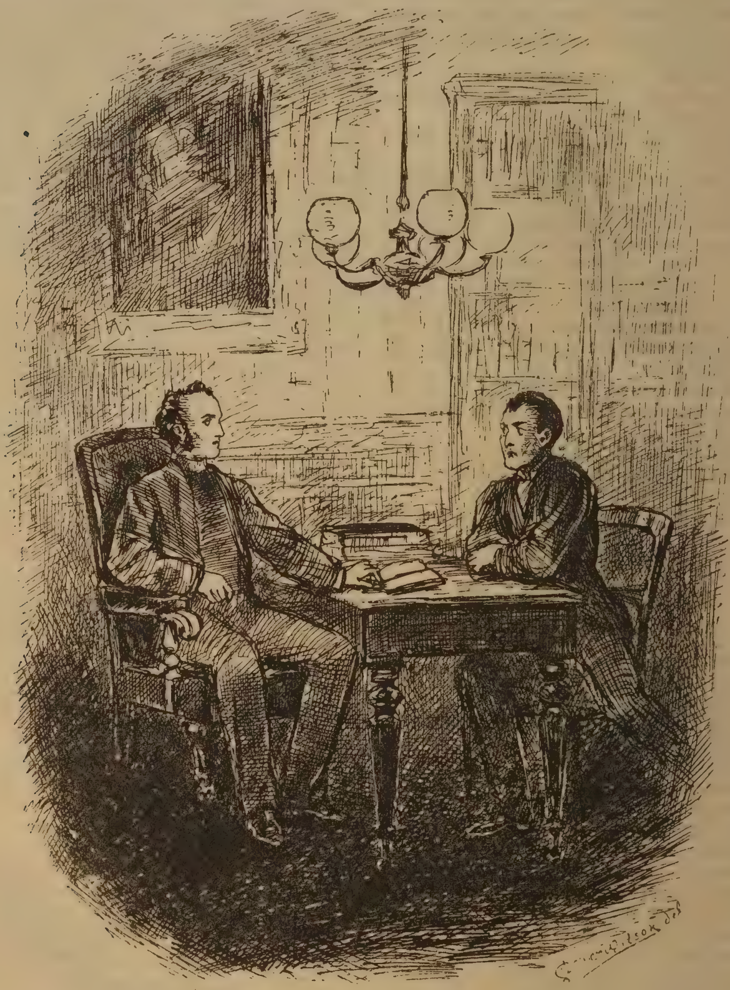
The countenance of the Minister was convulsed with pain, and for an instant he did not reply. Then he said,

"I am sorry for that, Noel Barnard."

"So am I; it's the only one thing I am tender about. It was, however, a politic step, and she has been well cared for. A man must be considerably worse than I am to harm one like her."

"I thank you. Up to this time I have thought you entirely without pity; but I suppose the acme of baseness is not yet exemplified."

"I should like you to know my lawyer. Should that worthy ever dissolve with me, he is specially retained for the Infernal Circuit. He's a useful man at keeping a concern together—very. My lawyer will do himself the pleasure of waiting upon you any time you may appoint for transfer of the cash, when also Miss Travers shall be at your disposal."


"HIS KEENLY GLITTERING EYES WERE ALL ABOUT HIM NOW. HE WAS AT BAY AT LAST."

"You are very considerate. If I understand you aright, I am to beggar myself at your bidding to recover my child?"

"And preserve your good name in your present field of action."

"After which I am expected to quit the country—in fact, leave you free to enjoy your spoil?"

"You put it with singular felicity, Sir; at the same time with a slight disregard for the laws of politeness."

"I will introduce the laws of politeness to your notice now. You were once acquainted with a man named Beech, I believe?"

The Minister's eyes, scathing as the lightning, fixed his opponent. Barnard turned restlessly, then drew his chair closer to the writer's table, and looked at the stern, handsome face curiously.

"A man of that name was once in my employ."

"A closer union than that linked you, Noel Barnard; you were fellow-convicts at Swan River!"

The long, thin face of the other became of a ghastly hue.

"From whence you escaped, in company with your comrade—both branded felons!"

He neither spoke nor moved; but, as though fascinated, his eyes never left the face of the Minister, who was sadly in earnest, and calm. No shadow of exultation crossed his brow.

"Beech is dead. He died penitent; and I was happy to take his hand as I would that of a friend, not for the confidence made me on his death-bed, but because of that penitence which makes us all stand upon equal ground."

It was no news to Barnard that the man was dead. For his own safety's sake he had decided that to be necessary long ago; but that the Minister should have been with him in his dying moments so impressed the half gypsy with omen-like significance that he gloomily muttered,

"Seems like fate, don't it?"

"Well, you are very likely to take that view of it; to me it demonstrates the inscrutable, retributive judgment of God."

"Turning of the tables, eh, Lionel?"

His keenly glittering eyes were all about him now. He was at bay at last.

"There is neither malice nor revenge in my heart. Out of the evil you wrought He brought forth good; for those who have suffered, very many have had cause to rejoice; for the pain inflicted upon my poor wife and child, another besides yourself is culpable, and as he hopes for pardon and extenuation, so he now extenuates and pardons you. For the rest, you will restore every farthing of which you have wronged me, together with Eagle Hall, by consent of the owner, which I am satisfied you will have no difficulty in gaining, accompanied by a document, signed by you, declaring upon oath in the presence of two witnesses, professional gentlemen of high standing, that I have been the victim of conspiracy and fraud, and am innocent of all the misdemeanors imputed to me. You will cause my little girl to be brought to this house to-morrow. If the address of my wife is known to you, I require it at your hands. When this is all transacted, I will permit you to leave the country, safe and free to pursue your business in other lands, where, if conducted upon an honorable basis, there is no reason why you should not acquire a far larger fortune than you have ever succeeded in making by dishonest ability and accomplished villainy. You were commending our black brethren to my interest. I do not return the compliment, but I advise retirement to some continent where your genius will have space to expand without injury to your fellow-creatures, and where character passes through transition stages without risk to others during the process."

Mr. Barnard heard the Minister to the end of his address; it was impossible to tell the effect of the arraignment, the judgment, or the sentence. he betrayed no emotion, nor, beyond an extra sallowness of complexion, evinced any feeling. The Minister was accustomed to taking the law into his own hands; he now did so without any hesitation, and certainly without compunction. Justice represented a great deal to him, mercy a great deal more. He would rather see this man, or a worse than this, leave the land unharmed, with the possible prospect of amending his ways and performing some worthier part, than consign him to the merciless rigor of inexorable law; in other words, Westley Garland was in the service of Christ, not Cæsar. The source of his mercy was the source of his fearlessness, and in his struggle against sin he would overcome the World, subdue the Flesh, and send the Devil about his business.

The accused for some time made no reply; his mind was busy with that period of his life recalled so abruptly, but which had flashed back to him with vivid outline. He saw again the manacled gang going forth, two and two, under the supervision of men armed with double-barrelled guns, who sat about on gates, or stumps, or clumps, all the time of the weary watch, while the convicts worked road-making, sometimes with mocking ridicule of their weaponed guards, always with scowling, revengeful looks. No talking was allowed between the convicts, but, while working, they acquired a Masonic language, and by sign conversed together unknown to their guards; sometimes, by practice of silent, moveless lips, interchanging looks of terrible significance, more fraught with ominous meaning than very long discussions; a speech of life and death invariably. By such means he and his comrade had planned a rush, and with mighty speed they sprang from the plot where they worked, leaping the scrub with giant bounds, and crouching flat while the first volley rattled above them; then up, clearing whole ridges of sand, and falling alongside while a repeated volley scoured the space; then up again, fleet like the wind, crawling behind the sheltering mallee while a third volley pursued them; then off for the open country! Shouting of the followers becoming fainter, and finally ceasing; on for the barren level, miles and miles in extent, until the welcome shepherd's hut is reached, when they are safe. The grazier possessing the run has various huts used by his shepherds, two to each hut; these being away the greater part of the day with their flocks, leave at the hut a man called the hut-keeper, who cooks for them and helps in various ways, and who is the most lonesome and wretched being on the face of the earth, and more often than not an escaped convict himself; anyway, he never fails to aid prisoners escaping; and when they are hiding by day in the bush, while the shepherds are away, bears to them provisions and drink, and furnishes them with coarse shirts and blouses in place of the convict garb marked with the red letters "P. S.," meaning Perth Stockade. Should pursuit follow them close, they are hidden away in the hollow of the blue-gum tree, thousands of which are found in all directions, and whose trunks would at one time have sheltered all Swan River Settlement. The timely help of the hut-man also extends to furnishing them with a billy and a pannikin for the carriage of their provisions and water, and, where he can spare it, a small hatchet, known there as a tomahawk. Thus accoutred, the escaped convict follows the coast by day, the tea-tree and mallee scrub affording covers and, when resting, shade; by night he takes to the road, when proportionately greater progress is made, the sand cliffs skirting the coast to some extent retarding it. Their greatest difficulty is in the matter of water; it is a thirsty route of many hundreds of sandy, desert miles; thus their journeying is timed, if possible, to camp each night by a pond (there called water-holes) or creek. Time is told by the Southern Cross at night, this and the whole body of planets there appearing of resplendent brilliancy. Often has Barnard recalled those night-marches when the white magellanic clouds tantalized them with silver promise, and it seemed as though the horrible pilgrimage never would be over; often has he heard in imagination the strange night noises that used to render the way fiendish even to one of his nerve—the curlew, screaming like some woman in a paroxysm of pain, a creature never seen, but heard with a vengeance; the laughing-jackass, a bird like our kingfisher, of a grayish-brown, notorious for the most diabolical yell of hilarity known, the bird no one kills since it enjoys the reputation of destroying the snakes; the mopoke; an owl-like bird, with a note resembling that of a loud cuckoo in an echoing vault; and other odd sounds helping to make the nightly orchestra below the Southern Cross an uncommonly hideous one.

There was a terrible distance to go before Adelaide was reached. The encounters were few and far between; some poor wretch looking for work, with whom they unhesitatingly shared rations; a man searching for his horses astray in the bush; some shepherd tramping on for a fresh track; or a drove of stock horses, without shoes, the breed trained for hunting cattle in the bush and upon the great plateau of grass land, with them a couple of rough drivers, pushing on for distant farms, who greeted the wayfarers with a jovial cheer natural to the Western Australian breeder: on their saddles before them were heavy hobbles —a strong iron instrument upon the handcuff principle, used for securing the horses, and which sent a cold thrill through the tramping comrades, hot as was the way. Several times they came upon a camp of blacks, the males being away hunting, leaving the old men and the females, called in that part "lubras," who received them kindly. Occasionally a team of two bullocks yoked to a dray lumbered along the roadway. If they approached a hut it was with caution, and they never disclosed their business unless the "old lag" in charge made the sign known to them. Foot-sore and hungry they now possessed their liberty, and it atoned for all they suffered. Starve they could not while the species of cypress known as the wild cherry grew on the way, its refreshing green a delight to the eye, its taste and sustenance pleasant and invigorating, and known from its poisonous fac-simile by the singularity of its stone growing outside; while the great spreading box-tree shed its manna in their very path, which they mixed with wattle-gum, also plentiful, rolled into balls, stored in their pannikins, and ate when hungry. They also experienced the mortification of finding the apples — dazzling-looking fruit — which, when gathered, are only wood, setting Gypsy Noel, who had despoiled many an orchard in old England, swearing finely.

Rivers were followed until they could cross on the sand, where, as is often the case, the bed was left dry under the severe drought.

Diversion they had also: a kangaroo drove would appear, two great ones in front followed by all the others very much according to size, a procession of leaping eccentricity that tickled Mr. Barnard's fancy immensely. The long lizard (called by the native the 'guana), speckled like the tree upon which it is found, amused them for hours. The lively insect known as the bull-dog likewise afforded some excitement; it is a long red ant, with a black head, and its sting is a mild edition of the wasp's. Occasionally a great black snake would draw itself sluggishly across their path. Once Barnard was bitten, and his treatment thereof was characteristic of the man's cool clinging to dear life: opening a clasp-knife, he cut out the bite, and in the notch filled gunpowder, then lighting a match, blew out the flame, placed the red end upon the powder, and with set teeth awaited the explosion which was to save his life. It is the common remedy in the West, and, of course, leaves the victim greatly exhausted; but tea and brandy, the favorite drink, and to be found in every hut, soon revives him.

It all came back to his mind while the Minister was speaking, all that horrible time of escape, and he could recall the delight with which the muddy roads and fences, way-side public-houses and outlying farms, were reached, telling of Adelaide. And this Minister had it in his power to cause his return thither, or perchance to a more terrible place still—this man who had suffered agonies at his hands, whom he had beggared and defamed! True, he bade him simply make common honorable restitution, mere ordinary fair reparation, and then go elsewhere and conduct his business upon an honest basis; but such clement, compassionate dealing was so foreign to Noel Barnard's apprehension he failed to believe in it, and judging his opponent's principles by his own, had no doubt of its being a *ruse* to obtain an admission of the tremendous fraud perpetrated upon Lionel Travers, and the systematic attempt to defame the character of Westley Garland, having gained which, with the restitution of all, he would turn upon himself and make use of Beech's confession to wreak a revenge in full. "But no you don't; I've not finished with you yet, my friend!" Saying which to himself, he rose, and standing, with deadly restraint upon any conflicting passions, he replied to the Minister's more than earthly leniency with cold cynical irony:

"So you propose my leaving your country, in which it seems to me there was just room for one of us to govern, but not both. Well, I shouldn't break my heart over doing so, Mr. Westley Garland, for a more boggy, foggy, pestiferous potato plot does not exist. In the cities one is smoke-dried as a haddock, and in the country one needs the constitution of a rhinoceros. It is termed by your Exeter Hall friends 'a favored land.' I could amend that panegyric by pronouncing it to be suffering from overcrowding, avariciousness, gluttony, vulgarity, superstition, bad manners, blighted affection, and tea-drinking. I could assert that it is overrun with monopoly, eaten up by immorality, and inhabited by old maids, doctors, publicans, and people supported by charity. Falseness is upon the face of it, and every man-jack rotten to the core; the women are all faithless, and the children story-tellers; the laundresses are dishonest, and commerce is a stark adulterator rampant wherever a line of bricks disfigures the landscape. For my part, with my tender conscience, I'd rather be the sovereign of the open and frank nomads, without tithe, tax, vote, vaccination, fires, explosion, smashes, colliery massacres, late hours, music-halls, social vice, tinselled virtue, potted meats, and co-operative stores, than of a hundred such favored lands, if I was obliged to take with them all the hollowness and sham, artificiality and hypocrisy, which go to make up the glory here."

Having thus asserted his warfare with the institutions of civilization, the speaker, turning a more ghastly hue, and with a change of tone to resolute defiance, declared war to the knife with the calm, wearied-looking man, with whom he was now having a hand-to-hand encounter.

"Before leaving your 'favored land,' however, or your favored company, I'll trouble you for the Beech document, since you've introduced the question of documents. You who know what it is to feel uncomfortable with some such ticklish death-warrant in view will readily imagine I can not leave this place without it; you know me too well to doubt my meaning." He had advanced a step nearer, the glare of a Cain in the cruel eyes, the teeth meeting with that ominous click which with Noel Barnard always meant mischief; his hand was gripped murderously; his breath came short as that of a beast of prey crouching to spring upon the foe. Yes, Westley Garland knew the meaning, and experienced the awful feeling one so finely and delicately strung experiences when confronted by one who would take a life to secure future safety. His was not the sinew of an athlete; but old exercises at Oxford were by no means forgotten, and he would defend himself with as determined courage from the attack of the murderer as from that of the slanderer. He arose also, very pale, but collected.

"The last time you threatened me, and indeed personally assaulted me, was in a dull Devon lane, with a burly coward at your back, and my escape from you and your persecutions was by what might have been a watery death; but now I no longer fear your violence or dread your intrigues. I have extended a conditional pardon; you refuse these conditions, and demand that I should relinquish the evidence wherewith to-morrow I will brand you the accursed thief and liar that you are! Now, beware, or by the Master I serve, I will lay you at my feet, and give your body to the moat you have used toward again effecting my ruin!"

The half gypsy stood glaring upon this aroused lion with fierce disdain. The antagonist would have it settled, then, one way or the other? So be it! With an enraged spring and the grip of a giant he was upon fragile Lionel, who staggered, but with fine skill shook off and parried the talon-like clutch of those iron fingers. The study table was knocked over, chairs were sent flying to the wall, the field thus gained afforded uninterrupted space for the awful struggle where dear life was the end fought for. An unseemly contention, of solemn issues, in that place of quiet study and thought, but its owner had no dictum which countenanced tamely submitting to be murdered in one's own harmless and inoffensive retreat. In the same degree, Westley Garland would take particular care not to permit a repetition of this horrible breach of order. The combat raged fiercely, and, notwithstanding Barnard's terrific onslaught, it was not altogether in his favor. Without miscalculating his opponent's strength, which was slender, he had not allowed for the mettle and force of a power inspired by just convictions, by righteous indignation, by anger approved and aided by Heaven. It was no stripling, no weak, spiritless man, but a being godlike and mighty for the time, with a grand wrath arming him with a great defense. Once did the Minister, with an appalling effort, hurl his assailant from him and stand, livid and gasping, conqueror of the breathing-time. The enraged and thwarted schemer was upon him again, and the struggle continued. Even Westley Garland's patience under these conditions failed him, and strong passion convulsed the usually composed control; and this exhausted the energy, his strength was far spent. With the final essay of a gladiator he threw his opponent, while at the same moment Constance ran in, frightened at the disturbance, and she gazed with scarcely believing eyes at the spectacle of her friend in terrible perturbation, one knee upon the prostrate cause of the extraordinary commotion. Then suddenly all resentment left his soul, and saddened, regretful emotion took its place, her mute surprise and sweet countenance were so reproachful. He arose from the retributive attitude, saying calmly, "Your punishment be in Higher hands; you are free to quit this place as you entered it. I give you sixteen hours to supply what I required of you. Should it not have arrived at my house in Brighton by one o'clock to-morrow, the confession I hold will be placed in the hands of the police."

Sullen, moody, yet with a certain haughty grace, Barnard drew himself up to his full height and strode to the door, where in the dusk, gloomy as some swart, vanquished Arab, with the desert of Ishmael before him, but imperious to the end, he stood facing them; and there was an awful look upon the face Constance could not witness, and turned away.

"Your conditions shall be complied with, Lionel Travers, and we shall meet no more. A final word with my adieu: your wife has discovered you, and believes with others in your *amour*—ahem! present company prevents explanation; enough that she lies dangerously ill in the village. Adieu. If we meet again, it will be in a warmer clime — business demands my instant presence in India."

And before the stricken and dismayed clergyman could move a step or utter a word his old enemy had gone—to trouble him no more. But what a burden of disastrous communication he had left with them! It seemed for the moment to paralyze and benumb to unconsciousness, so bewildering was the complete significance. It was Constance with her tender and still action at this crisis that revived and re-assured.

"Do not be overwhelmed," she said. "Of course you are in error, and they have seized upon the one error to wreak their design for ill. I have no doubt whatever that this misfortune *has* been brought about by design; your presence of mind now will alone serve us. It will not do to hasten and explain all; such impulse, painful though you will find it to resist doing so, would be perilous in the extreme; neither may I go to her under these delicate circumstances, until she has learned how we are misjudged."

But then, that reality, her love, confronted poor Constance, and in confusion she ceased mid-way in her office of ministering one.

"Yes, you are right," said the Minister, faintly, as coming out of a terrible dream; the events of the night had shattered him, before tried and very worn and weary. "We must use great care; I fear for the result. We need some gentle help just now, one to go to her whose presence would not affright, whose message could not distress. A depth of tender tact and soft thoughtfulness is wanted such as I only know yourself and Lady Guilmere to possess, and her ladyship is unknown to our poor darling: no stranger may intrude upon the sanctity of this great sorrow, exquisite though my friend's delicacy may be."

"I think I can suggest a happy proposal, admitting we can find little Ella. Let her undertake this angel's mission; unless she has strangely altered, you could not have any one perform it better."

His face lighted up instantly, while he trembled at the near prospect of recovering his child.

"If Barnard fulfills my stipulations, Ella will be restored to me to-morrow."

"Then you have nothing to fear, and every thing to hope."

And when Constance had retired, when silence reigned and a calm that seemed death-like after that unseemly fray, the Minister could review at searching leisure the effect upon his fortunes of this encounter. Daylight would surely dawn, and the dark cloud so long hanging over him be banished by the new light breaking with the morrow.

Long did he sit musing over that final blow, the keenest his enemy had administered. He had dreaded above all things any such inopportune discovery regarding himself, but this full catastrophe had never presented its dread semblance. His very retirement converted into a weapon for their destruction! Certainly this last of his enemy's machinations appeared indeed the most fiendish.

One other matter caused Mr. Garland grave care—he had been thinking of this at the time of Barnard's intrusion—the attitude taken by the public in the face of the slanders circulating. It caused him poignant sorrow that the knowledge of his character as judged by his work should not preclude any such falling away of confidence. He resolved to confront this public wavering, and read it a lesson greatly needed in modern times.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LESSON READ TO A PEOPLE.

Should "The Natural History of Pew-Openers" ever be written, a gallery of their portraits ever be arranged, a lecture upon the species ever be delivered, then must Miss Turner be remembered, so essentially was that quiet, decorous, amiable person a very model of the perfect type of old-school aisles-women whom every pastor who adheres to the traditions of our fathers would like to secure—especially those believing in a comely, well-behaved person who, with lightness and expedition, would conduct the halting stranger to the seat not likely to be required by its holder at the particular service he attended.

Trade might be slack at the little mart in Preston Terrace, ladies might seem to have altogether abandoned the picturesque manipulation of Berlin wools, and the stationery section be at a stand-still, but it in no degree affected Miss Turner's civil and respectful address. Ever at her post, and at all times by a pleasant manner showing that it was a congenial office, she certainly tried her best to prove how thoroughly devotion to a cause may be the mainspring of success.

We who have previously penetrated the recesses of this elderly in years but young in faithfulness coadjutor's heart, know the secret admiration she treasured, and the simple constancy which rendered the conducting of every person along the aisle to hear *him* preach a process of singular delight. The man was so much of a hero, so elevated a being, that although she might be sitting upon the very back seat in the church—so distant that she would never place another there—so far away that the tenderest of his tones, the lower utterances quivering with emotion, were indistinguishable, yet she hung upon his words as those do who hear only with the heart. Miss Turner's mind had of late been greatly upset because of the damaging reports in circulation defamatory to her hero. It had not diminished the attendance, but then they were the people who attended from curiosity, and whose morbid taste would take them as soon to a police court as to a church. Her hero had passed the defiling borderline dividing celebrity from notoriety. He was no longer—to the crowd—the ideal of all Christian excellence and eloquence, but the famous man who, possibly, had done something wrong, and, if he had not, ought to have done; and as this sort of hero pleases the crowd the best, there was no diminution in the attendance at the services, although there was a serious decrease in church membership—the ladies who sat plover fashion, and other credulous and particular families, having withdrawn. It was all a sincere grief to the pew-opener, who believed him as pure as any human being could be, guiltless and very near sinless. She felt it acutely, this inroad of a laughing, whispering, careless set, many of whom did not even find the places in the hymn-books she courteously handed to them. And Miss Turner wondered whether he knew it; had any ripple of the foully disturbed current reached his lofty standpoint; and what did he think of it. So high—could man stand higher?—and to be assailed by such coarse slander! This indignant, worthy woman felt she would like to follow up, trace to its noisome covert each slimily crawling lie, and extract its fang. The greatest, as he was the best, and they could not let even him alone! Miss Turner could hardly contain herself when reflecting upon the poisonous trail. Half the night she was awake, devising means for checking the pestilent lie; but what could she do, poor soul, with her restricted influence, in her humble sphere of labor?

The charges were grave, Miss Turner knew, but who on earth could substantiate one of them? As if a calumny or a scandal ever needed substantiating.

One evening, at eight-o'clock service, among others crowding in was a polite elderly gentleman, who, by reason of his gently affable manner, won upon Miss Turner's attention before the other folk. Leaning toward her, the gentleman introduced a friend who, he said, had come a very long distance to hear Mr. Garland preach; would she kindly place them in a seat near the pulpit, as they were a little deaf. A mild fiction on the part of the man popularly thought mad; but he was so anxious that Sir Kinnaird, whom he had actually induced to come on purpose, should see and hear the Minister to the best advantage, that he adopted this appeal to the sympathy of the mild-eyed, kind-faced pew-opener; and she at once conducted the two gentlemen and a little girl who accompanied them to Mr. Blake's pew, immediately below the pulpit. "Your lordship," whispered Sir Dickson Cheffinger over the hymn-book Miss Turner had placed in his hand, and across little Ella sitting between the two, "will now have an opportunity of seeing the famous Minister;" and then Sir Dickson lowered his head to the book ledge, knowing it to be the custom. He had a hazy notion what to say, but he mumbled something to himself about speedily being restored to his rights, and was devotional in the extreme. Sir Kinnaird, who was never equal to stooping or bending, effected a compromise by holding his hat with his very elegant and lady-like hand before his face. Then he looked admiringly around the building, the architecture of which pleased him.

It was the evening following that of Barnard's memorable intrusion. The day had brought the document demanded, also a communication to the effect that arrangements were in progress for carrying out the other conditions; to this was added the disagreeable intelligence that the little girl had escaped from the custody of his servant, and could not be traced. Mr. Garland was exceedingly troubled and care-worn in consequence, and by no means in the best cue for his duties, but firm in his intention of occupying the pulpit, that personally he might confront rumor and dispel report. He had learned by inquiry, made with every care through Constance, that his poor wife was ill at the house of Mrs. Evans. During the day no further steps were taken, as it was urgently necessary to use the utmost caution at this juncture.

Mr. Garland was in the vestry, talking confidentially with Rev. Spencer Webb. The curate was full of sympathy with his friend now passing under this tidal wave of prejudice and suspicion, and predicted for it but a brief season.

"Do let me prevail upon you to return home, and allow Mr. Evelyn or myself to preach?"

"I have no intention of preaching to-night, my dear friend; a few passages of Scripture to serve as a word or two with my people." Said with marvellous gentleness, yet with such sad regret Mr. Webb was much moved.

"The church is filling fast." A sorrowful expression was upon the speaker's face; he knew the motive bringing these people to stare upon this calm, outraged disciple of gentleness and love. But a terrible light was gathering in the eye; the nostrils dilated with a sense of indignity and wrong; veins on the white, broad brow outlined a course not hitherto perceptible; the cheeks bore a faint flush seldom seen there, and when he took Webb's hand it was with a throbbing and convulsive, albeit firm, grasp.

"I will teach these people a lesson the like of which never was taught from pulpit, and answer them, in Higher Word than mine, the whole of their base charge."

He was trembling slightly, but would soon be composed. Mr. Webb gently drew an oak chair toward him, and the Minister sat down wearily.

"Let me again beg of you to retire for to-night. You are not well; you have had too much of late to try your strength. As usual, you have been thinking all of others and never of yourself."

"I am thinking of myself to-night." It was said with pathetic significance. "A delicate remonstrance is, I consider, due. I can address this to my people with more propriety than your kind self or Mr. Evelyn." Then he abruptly asked, "Are any of the Blakes here this evening?"

"No. Strangers occupy their pew."

"I am glad of that. Give me my small Bible, and leave me for a few minutes to myself."

With loving respect Mr. Webb did as desired, and proceeded to the organist's room, where Mr. Evelyn was giving that gentleman his directions.

When alone, the Minister sat to the table with an almost stern aspect, so inflexible was it. He had been bitterly attacked, and there are some creatures of too magnificent an organization to submit tamely to excess of injury. With the precise yet ready faculty usually characterizing his study of Scripture, he had selected his passages and marked his annotations before the evening service commenced, and then indulged in short but earnest prayer.

When the verger came to him, with the one church-warden who remained faithful, to assist him with his gown, he informed them that he would not leave the vestry until the hymn before the sermon, when, at the last verse, he would proceed straight to the pulpit; and he desired that a glass of water might be there in readiness if required.

Up to the ordeal he wished to be alone.

Soul-sympathy caught of the eye is at all times the helpful human source of inspiration in the pulpit. If he met eyes upon this evening they would, he felt sure, be cold, or curious, or speculative—rudely bold, with vile doubt behind, mockingly cruel, unfeeling; but he determined they should not oppress the intention—righteous and just intention—with which he entered the pulpit. "If I speak to them in the words of Holy Writ," he thought, "it may carry more weight than any language of mine."

All this time Miss Turner's activity had been taxed to an unusual degree, and she was just wondering where she could put our friends Miss Ticklewich and Miss Caddie, and had at last made room for them under the gallery, when the doorway was blocked by a number of ladies, the leader of whom accosted poor Miss Turner imperiously with, "You'll put us all together, please." There were thirteen of them, and Miss Turner didn't know how or where to oblige, with all her agile, accommodating willingness; but Miss Penelope and party had come specially to quiz and revile this preacher, and if Miss Turner made any trouble about it they would march in a body and take possession of the pulpit stairs, and they told her so. This alarmed the worthy creature so much, that, quick and decorous of movement, she brought chairs from the school-room, and placed them in line down the centre aisle.

Mrs. Wriggle was also present upon this occasion. There was a wide distinction, in Mrs. Wriggle's opinion, between a sinner and a saint. A conscientious Congregationalist might go to stare at a sinner in the church who would have no business to sit under the same person when considered a saint. Before the service was over, Mrs. Wriggle received change in full.

Mrs. Lurch was there. Mr. Lurch had resigned his office from motives of principle and scrupulous regard for the honor of the Establishment, but Mrs. Lurch was there, a whisper having reached her that the man at bay would have a word or two to say; and she wondered keenly what he would have the audacity to put forward in extenuation. Mrs. Lurch, with a pang, sat and looked the side seats hard in the face; she suffered on account of not being able to sit in her cap. Mrs. Lurch considered it outrageous that ladies should be obliged to wear bonnets during divine service.

Mrs. and Miss Bobbin were present. Miss Bobbin looked plaintively at the Rev. Mr. Webb while that gentleman was reading the Lessons, as though imploring his special protection in the event of a scene when that dreadful Minister appeared. It was significantly noted that he was not present, in his pew or at the communion-table, during the reading of the Prayers, and the clever ones, with scoffing toss up of their heads, whispered, "Daren't show his face, you know;" while those who were not clever, sneeringly replied, "A little too warm for him this evening, perhaps."

Only one person thought the truth—that he was faint and ill, but that he would, when the time came, go through his duty like a being to whom weakness was unknown. It was Miss Turner who guessed all, and she would have given much to go to him with the service of a Martha.

The Countess of Comdarlington had arrived, and with her the Hon. Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover. At dinner that evening her ladyship said, "Mr. Garland informed the earl this morning that he would be away in Devonshire some few weeks, so that if you would like to hear him for the last time, I believe, you must go to this evening's service."

With propriety and impressiveness the service proceeded until singing of the hymn before the sermon. While the congregation were singing the last verse, more eyes upon the vestry door than upon their hymn-books, it was opened by the verger, and there was a thrill electric through the whole area as the Minister appeared, and, with almost majestic mien, ascended the pulpit stairs. And the people thought it did not look much like guiltiness or shame-strickenness. "But then, you know, it's his method of braving it out," said the clever ones; "when the clergy are detected at this sort of thing they're sure to carry a high hand." Those who were not clever said, "He knows he daren't show his face here again, and means to brave it." Merely an echo of what the clever people had said, but whispered with as sharp venom as though original. This darker machinery works in certain grooves.

The hymn was ended; the last note of the organ lingered, as though giving him all the time possible; rustling of silk dresses subsided; the book which somebody always drops when there is a painful hush had dropped; every eye in the building, save those of one person, were upon the Minister. Miss Turner, somehow, could not look at him; there was a sublime and awful expression upon his face, and the tender-hearted pew-opener could not look thereon. By his wish the gas had not been lowered upon this occasion, and he stood before his people with a certain sad haughtiness that made itself felt before a word was uttered. The silence was profound and painful. He seemed astonishingly at his leisure, so calmly was he turning the leaves of the Bible, not in the least, however, as though trifling or playing with the occasion or the effect; rather as overweighted by the responsibility of his purpose. Then he announced this passage of Scripture in a clear, firm voice—in the death-like stillness it had never seemed so clear—"The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, the ninth chapter, the third verse." A pause. Faithful to his intention, he did not look at any person while reading forth this bold preliminary passage, "*Mine answer to them that do examine me is this!*" And people looked at one another, and then, just out of curiosity, hunted for the place to see if it really was in the Bible—it seemed so apposite—but having in their astonishment forgotten whose epistle, and to whom sent, they couldn't find it, and set it down as an invention.

From the entrance of the Minister a spell was upon Sir Kinnaird Dalton, whose delicate organization, never equal to surprises of any sort, was for a time entirely unnerved before this stupendous redivivus; but then he soothingly re-assured himself, thinking, after the old cynical fashion, "It'll make the turning up of people more confusing than ever, now the really defunct have commenced to fill the pulpits; but it will vary proceedings, and most of the churches will benefit by the change. I should like to go up and grasp his hand, and tell him I forgive the cruel deception, but of course one can not do that before all these people." By the time this had, with difficulty, crossed the baronet's equably tempered understanding, he became conscious the recognition was even more unsettling to his little companion: startled and breathless in her surprise, she sat with large open eyes looking upward while emotion sent the color hot to her cheeks.

He never looked toward their pew; he had been told strangers were there, and for a time strangers were an eye-sore. The brief pause—an impressive interval of suspense, when every uplifted face betrayed the eager expectancy, when every head was busy wondering what discourse would follow that significant text—then was heard this, uttered in the same grave tone, with the same grave yet haughty calmness, "The book of the Prophet Ezekiel, the ninth chapter, the eleventh verse." A pause. "Goodness!" said Mrs. Wriggle to herself, "if the man isn't going to have two texts!" She heard it: "*And, behold, the man which had the inkhorn by his side reported the matter;*" and "I know that isn't in the Bible," she said. "I should think he wants an anonymous post-card sent to him with those words on from the last chapter of Revelation, descriptive of the plagues bestowed upon the man who adds to the Scriptures!" Meanwhile the congregation was exercising itself wonderingly, and a reporter for one of the Brighton papers began to feel uncomfortable, moving a little to the left, an exceedingly stout lady in front affording the grateful shelter of a rock in the burning desert. The Minister did not pause so long between this and the next passage it was his pleasure to read; the people, if they would, might think them in connection: "The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, the third chapter, the seventh and eighth verses." A pause. Then deliberate reading of this passage: "*Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*" He waited, that the verse might sink deep, before proclaiming its companion—"*Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued.*" Whereat Mrs. Lurch tossed her head with infinite disgust, but remembering the action failed to bear impressiveness without the cap, she was satisfied with looking scandalized, on behalf of Mr. Lurch, so late an office-bearer of the church, and with setting the example of the only course proper under so personal an attack to the connections present of other office-bearers who did not keep a brougham. In view of all this, and remembering her position as wife of one of the leading tradesmen in Brighton, Mrs. Lurch indignantly quitted her pew, and marched out, followed by the said connections, who were scattered here and there about the church. It created some commotion. The Minister waited until there was silence, still looking upon his book—he had scarcely lifted his eyes from the avenging pages—then gave out one other passage, "The book of the Prophet Ezekiel, the thirty-sixth chapter, the third verse." In the short interval between this and the words, Mrs. Bobbin whispered Miss Merino, "I never did like that Prophet Ezekiel, what little I've read of him!" and Miss Merino whispered back, "I do feel so timorous, ma; the place seems full of thunders and lightnings. I'd go out, but I'm so nervous." The preacher was heard reading: "*Thus saith the Lord God, Ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people.*" The Hon. Mrs. Glover, turning to her friend the countess, observed, in a seriously displeased manner, "I am so sorry we came, dear; this is profane! No person has a right to twist the sacred chronicles to suit his purpose." "Bear with him, darling," replied her ladyship; "but he is a naughty one, I do believe."

Yet one glance at the face, with its aggrieved sadness—an expression that since he commenced had deepened to solemnity—was sufficient to dispose of any opinion as to his reverence and devotion. He had never appeared more thoroughly in earnest, more impressed with the responsibility of his priestly office. Immovable, inflexible, he continued calmly as before:

"The book of Job, the thirtieth chapter, the first verse." People found this—Job, xxx. 1 was easy of remembrance. The young people, who had been forward with jeer and jest, were particularly quick at finding it; they rather enjoyed the lesson being read to their elders; but they very soon lost the place again while the Minister read, "*They that are younger than I have me in derision;*" and without pausing he read on, "The twenty-first chapter of the book of Job, the third verse: '*Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.*'" Oh yes, they quite thought them in connection; too much so! The color mounted to their cheeks. Miss Merino, with pardonable yearning to be in affinity with these young deriders, tried to look as though the coupled reproach covered her also with confusion; the attempt was futile, and caused a thin, afflicted-looking person next to her to shrink acutely, believing Miss Merino was going to sneeze; and with violent antipathy to persons sneezing any where, the thin, afflicted-looking person especially disliked it in church, and when sitting next to it.

The large number of people who had come from vulgar curiosity and out of sheer desire to stare for half an hour, at cushioned leisure and gratis, at the man every body was talking about—this considerable body of persons began to wish themselves well out of it, for there was no telling what this goaded and baited hero would say to them; he seemed all in the mood, with that quiet, resolute manner of his. They didn't think it was going to be like this, or they wouldn't have come. And while they were thus agreeing, the Minister read again:

"The book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the fifty-first chapter, the fifty-first verse: '*We are confounded, because we have heard reproach: for strangers are come into the sanctuaries of the Lord's house.*'"

And they who had done so looked vicious and vexed; and, disliking it altogether, very many of them arose and left the sanctuary to the Minister's own people.

Wonderful was the light upon that meek woman's face at her humble station by the door. She had wanted to take his part, to stand his champion; but how effectively he was doing this for himself, and without one of his own gifted words, that, occasion demanding, she did not doubt would be even as arrows of fire.

The exodus of strangers did not disturb that stern yet suffering judge; upholding a righteous cause, he was not troubled by the departure of any whose conscience would not permit of their remaining. But it was curious to see the gaps. He did not see them; his eyes were upon the Book whereby he judged, whereby he lived.

He read continuously these several passages, that dropped like shells among the people—"The thirty-first Psalm, the thirteenth verse: '*For I have heard the slander of many.*' The tenth chapter of Ecclesiastes, the eleventh verse: '*Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.*' The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, the second chapter, the sixteenth and seventeenth verses: '*Shun profane and vain babblings. Their word will eat as doth a canker.*' The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians, the fourth chapter, the twenty-ninth verse: '*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.*' The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians, the fourth chapter, the eleventh verse: '*Study to be quiet, and to do your own business.*' The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, the eleventh chapter, the twenty-first verse: '*I speak as concerning reproach.*' The book of Leviticus, the nineteenth chapter, the sixteenth verse: '*Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people.*'"

"I say," whispered Sir Dickson Cheffinger to Sir Kinnaird Dalton, "what is it all about?"

"Goodness knows! Sounds like an adieu, with a summary at the close of a pastorate. But what an awful fellow for texts!"

Miss Ticklewich and friend could really sit no longer at a service, as they expressed it, which was a mere burlesque upon holiness, and conducted with a total disregard of reverence and every thing else. It was not because it was a week-night service that it was to be travestied in this form; it only proved the hardihood and confident audacity of this man, to whom the multitude had looked for spiritual guidance. Miss Caddie, however, said far less than her companion, upon whom the mantle had fallen ever since the Comdarlington *réunion*. As they made a way out for themselves they were joined by Mrs. Wriggle, who had never worn so sour a look. "If Ebenezer had been here," she said, aloud, as they passed out of the centre door, "he would have answered some o' them Scripter charges—a crawling, crafty jumble of sentiments as never ought to have been invented and inserted by a set of stupid revisers, who were evidently unqualified for their work, or they'd have either left out all likely to give offense to respectable and well-to-do people, or else have put 'em all together under one heading, in italics, '*Sentence of the Congregation on a Perjured Priest!*' I've no patience with such a behemoth and Pharisee, without principle, and past arguing with or bettering."

Although Mrs. Wriggle's denunciations were not lucid they were strictly acid; the dear friends with her found the lady's company a piquant addition to their own little dish, but not acceptable enough for an invitation to supper.

Several other people left the church at the same time. When silence was restored, and not before, the Minister resumed the reading of his lesson. It was to a thinned congregation, yet perhaps on that very account an extra attentive one; it is certain those left bestowed extreme heed to the words, and expressed their opinion afterward.

"The book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the ninth chapter, the fourth verse: '*Every neighbor will walk with slanders.*'" Yes, many of these neighbors *had* done, but when told of it thought the thing cowardly. He continued: "The eighteenth chapter and eighteenth verse: '*Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices; for the law shall not perish from the priest. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.*'" And they looked at one another curiously, their conscience smiting them: the preacher continuing, "The twentieth chapter, the tenth and eleventh verses: '*For I heard the defaming of many. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty, terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed, their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.*'"

These neighbors could bear no more. They rose in a body, and left the church. Really the pews were becoming sparsely occupied, the devoted remainder looking too obdurate to feel any thing. Even the Rev. Robert Evelyn was disconcerted; it was not orthodox, by any means. He looked his disapproval across to the Rev. Spencer Webb, when the Rev. Spencer Webb nodded slightly, as to signify it was all right, and their friend knew what he was about.

Their friend had not yet closed account with his congregation, for he proceeded to read, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the third verse: '*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.*'" "Ah!" thought they, "he is for brazening it out with insolent assurance!" But they heard this: "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth verses: '*Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat: I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved.*'" And they modified their views, he continuing: "St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the fourth chapter, the eighth and ninth verses: '*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*' The book of the Prophet Isaiah, the fiftieth chapter, the eighth verse: '*He is near that justifieth me.*' The book of Job, the twenty-ninth chapter, the fourteenth verse: '*My judgment was as a robe and a diadem.*'"

It really seemed so, looking upon that glorious figure in the pulpit, his countenance lighted from the inner consciousness of innocence and purity. And thus thought the pew-opener while her entranced gaze seldom left his face. He was rather longer in giving utterance to the next passages, and his voice was moved to tenderness; so tender was it one and another wondered whether that stern aspect could have been real. "St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the twelfth chapter, the fifteenth verse: '*The more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*'" It fell as a keen-edged reproach, and they began to fidget the hassocks, and move with their toes impatiently. It was not all. He gave out: "The twentieth verse: '*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates, backbitings, whisperings.*'" Those last fears were particularly applicable to some whose occupations they were. "St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," the preacher resumed, "the fourth chapter, the ninth verse: '*But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*'" They had not asked of themselves a question so pertinent; and, now it was asked by him who had turned accuser, they could not answer it. And that there might be no mistake as to whom he addressed himself, this followed: "St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the first chapter, the twenty-first verse: '*You, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind.*'" United to it a gentle pastoral remonstrance. "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the second chapter, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses: '*Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy.*'" It needed not their quickly beating hearts to bear testimony to its truth; it was written of deeds that would never die, its witness was spoken of the poor and sorrowing, those with no helper and having no friend. Some of these remembered that, and, stricken, they also, with bowed heads and reverently, quitted the building. He had many a time and oft filled buildings to overflowing; this memorable night he was emptying his church, without any aid from the eloquence he would not deign to use for such a purpose.

There were those remaining "staring stonily," who had been delighted to draw the attention of friends and acquaintances to the fact of his having a banking account, to the circumstance of the considerable treasure he was, in their opinion, amassing together. And those who had been indirectly influenced, by the elaborate machinations of Barnard, to think and speak slightingly of the Minister. And those who had been assiduous in criticising his books and searching for defects and inequalities. To all he replied in a few well-chosen phrases. "The book of Job, the thirty-first chapter, the twenty-fourth and other verses: '*If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; and my heart hath been secretly* *enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him; neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul. Behold, my desire is, that mine adversary had written a book.*' "

When he included that superdelicate ethical propriety of the heart being enticed, and the mouth kissing the hand, those who had disseminated scandal to that effect felt embarrassed and touched at last; he gave the conclusion to that matter with daring innovation that was emphatically a cure. "The book of Job, the thirty-first chapter, the first verse: '*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why, then, should I think upon a maid?*' " It was not to be supposed even they could sit patiently under that! With general consent, as it were, they arose, and with an outraged and virtuous expression followed the example of those who had departed. The exponents of the gold theory, taking advantage of the confusion thus created, went out also, under shelter, and the critics followed them. Mr. Garland's hearers were few at this point; the indefatigable Miss Penelope and band, however, determined (strength being given them) to see it out.

Very calmly did the Minister read his next selections from Scripture, but with terrible decision. "St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, the second chapter, the twelfth verse: '*I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*' " Miss Penelope's head tossed in revolt, and she looked round with ominous meaning to the string, sitting still in a ghastly line, although on both sides of them was a waste of empty pews. The preacher proceeded: "The book of the Prophet Isaiah, the fifty-ninth chapter, the fourth and fifth verses: '*They trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper.*' "

The cockatrice settled it; the whole band, with exception of Miss Dido, whose heart had warmed at the mention of eggs, was too acutely wounded by adoption of that word to remain any longer. They could have borne any other term, but that fatal application was the straw breaking their sublime resolution to sit it out, come what come would! With loathing and scorn, Miss Penelope and attendant goddesses strode forth, with noise and with bitterness. The majority of those remaining accompanied them.

Then the Rev. Westley Garland spake his closing passages to the slender few left to hear them, perhaps the few of all that large concourse truly faithful to him. "St. Paul to the Philippians, the fourth chapter, the eighth verse; and the Epistle of James, the first chapter, the twenty-seventh verse: '*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Pure religion and undefiled before God is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*' "

These were his last words in the pulpit upon that memorable occasion, and it was a fitting termination, rounding the roughness of grouping, and making symmetrical the fragmentary whole. Afterward he sat back as he was accustomed to do after preaching, shading the brow and eyes with his hand. He looked very pale and harassed upon this trying evening.

The Rev. Robert Evelyn gave out the closing hymn, and the slender residue of worshippers entered into the praise with spirit. It seemed to revive him; he raised his head, looking upward, a beautiful light on the face. From old habit, unconsciously, his gaze wandered in the direction of Joseph Blake's pew, and rested upon the face of Ella; he had so often looked down upon Rose thinking of his own, and fancying her there. This reality, albeit thrilling him to the soul, was to him as imaginary; sight grew dim; he closed his eyes, pained. The solemnity of the music, the low song of the people, moved him to tender melancholy; he longed to be alone, where no human eye could see: he was so tired of the publicity—bearable by pleasant lines, but unutterably wearying by these darker tracks. The people retired; the Minister walked to the vestry, where Mr. Webb and Mr. Evelyn awaited him with affectionate solicitude.

"I know how distasteful this has been to you," said Mr. Webb, relieving their friend of his gown.

"I have engaged in more happy work, I admit. I shall not mind the unpleasantness if my dear people apprehend by it the wrong involved in their suspicions. Do not wait; I shall be here but a very short time, and will see that all is left in order. Many thanks for all!"

They understood that he wished to be alone, and, with instant and thoughtful delicacy, left him.

All the stately building was shadowy and dim; a light in the vestry, a light by the door where the patient pew-opener sat immovable, as though carved from that dusky changeless oak. Yet, silent though she was, she breathed quick with sudden interest and sympathy. She saw him walk with slow pace and lowered head to the altar. It was as though he walked in thought, in devotion, or in pain.

And most truly it was with each of these he betook himself to the most sacred site where man, made minister, and minister, made man, can go with his burden of sorrows and of hopes. It was his last approach for a long time; and, moved by solemn and conflicting emotion, he would there lay and leave all his care and trouble, taking hence but the peace which comes with perfect assurance of Divine love, and the calm which is natural after turmoil in the war betwixt Good and Evil. He was powerfully affected while kneeling there; but it was all dark, and there was no one remaining of all that loved him save the poor pew-opener. Stay! A footstep so light, it was as though one of the winged seraphs from the marble slabs upon the walls had flitted before the altar; it stole upon him there, wound an arm around his neck, stooped with love the sweetest under heaven, with lips that kissed and whispered, "Papa dear, my own darling, dear papa!" A gentle and low utterance, but passionate with love; and it shook him mightily; he knew then what he had seen was real, knew that his own had found him while he had been vainly searching for those lost. He could not speak for a little while, but turned and drew her to him, his throbbing brow falling restingly upon her bosom, where she stood by him trembling. Both their hearts were too frail with the suffering which had long been their portion, to evince either control or firmness. Restored to one another's love, life sweetened by the return to life, danger and difficulty over, a realm of still happiness opening before them, it was indeed a thrilling moment, and a strangely unlooked-for sequel to those incidents that had crowded upon each. Within himself he felt glad to be reunited to his darling thus; it was idyllic, and partook of the solemn aspect which led him to feel her restored by Him before whom all altars are. It was the sweet reward that followed upon toil, and the after-joy of which he had so often thought. There was the fine simplicity of true poetry about it all; a grave, imposing recital comely with anxieties at rest, espoused to calm thankfulness, the silent praise which in the low light of evenings in the East follows the seductive strains of cymbal and song rejoicingly.

The two by the altar in that shadowy church, where he had so often swayed the crowd, presented a singular reflection upon destiny; and neither poet nor artist could well have designed a situation of deeper meaning than this, come about so simply. Show us some ingenious puzzle-intricacy of grays, some artful commingling of shadows, some reflex of the primary beauty of steel-cloud and silver, and it will not be more significant with grave tint and tone, or more chaste with absence of all garish color. It was all in accord with the quieter calling.

With marvellous tenderness the Minister took his child to the heart that had never ceased to love her with the tenderness that has passed describing by words. Little was said, but that naturally had reference to her mother, and Ella's surprise and grief may be conceived when he delicately told her of how that mother was lying ill at the village near by. It must occupy their instant attention. Ella did not possess her father's calm knowledge of the danger of shocks, and would have flown to the dear one there and then; but the Minister explained the priceless lesson of patience, explained that the abruptness of love may be at times a selfishness and a cruelty. It must be broken with wonderful gentleness to their dear suffering one; and little Ella, when promised this loving office should be performed by herself, was fain to be content. He knew no creature in the world would perform a mission of such delicacy with more gentle tact.

Then they went down the church. In the vestibule the baronet and his erratic companion were awaiting the issue with impatience. An affecting greeting passed between the friends of so very opposite nature. Sir Dickson Cheffinger stood in the background with retiring respect, until Sir Kinnaird with his languid grace drew the Minister's more immediate attention to the poor gentleman.

"You must thank Sir Dickson Cheffinger for the recovery of your little girl. He discovered her and brought her to my house, rightly judging I would interest myself at as early a moment as my awfully torpid temperament would admit of. But I really do think," continued the baronet, while the Minister warmly grasped Sir Dickson's hand, "you have done me good, and have stirred the sluggish current. The whole affair is so out of the beaten track, and your valedictory address was so unusual, I half entered into the spirit of the thing. But what have they been up to?"

"Falling into the weakness of modern times, making light of the ministry, and sport of the minister."

The fastidious Sir Kinnaird, who never touched this sort of thing, said, with a movement of indolent weariness,

"Better go on to my hotel. Lot of draughts here; a general discomfort that may chill one's proper tone. What are you going to do?" To Sir Dickson, whom he was by no means anxious to take to his hotel.

"Look for some quiet apartments," replied the poor gentleman, humbly.

"I think my friend here has some rooms that will suit you very well," said the Minister, kindly, indicating Miss Turner with a courteous movement of the hand.

The pew-opener bowed with meek but grateful appreciation.

"Miss Turner will show you to her house, where you will be very comfortable." Shaking hands with Sir Dickson, he drew him aside, and in a low voice acquainted him with this startling piece of news, "I have been to CHEFFINGER upon your business. It is in my power to return this good service, as I promised I would do if possible. You will be installed at CHEFFINGER ere very long!"

The poor gentleman heard, and long after they had gone stood dazed beneath its overwhelming import. It was not until the gentle voice of the pew-opener broke that spell that he bestirred himself, and gradually realized all its happy meaning. Then he said to himself, "Cousin Claude has filled the old place with many guests, I have heard; but what troops of visitors *I* shall have when I am installed at CHEFFINGER!"

They walked on to Preston Terrace, and Sir Dickson was greatly taken with it, and also with his kind landlady.

"One thing has surprised me," said Sir Kinnaird to the Minister on the way to the hotel. "It is that while under process of transmigration you did not develop into a Doctor of Divinity at once, so many of the fellows we used to know have passed into that, presumably, happier state."

"I don't know why it should be; I did not think it necessary. I relied upon the one simple title our own and other Churches permit and honor, without even so much as taking advantage of the university degree to which I am, as you know, entitled. It would be interesting to know, however," he added, with half-sad, half-comical earnestness, "whether the higher grade exempts the modern minister from that vein of criticism which verges upon the slanderous."

CHAPTER XLIV.

REUNITED.

A NEAT and pleasant chamber, where shaded light and exquisite stillness aided an invalid's gradual recovery.

The blow, shattering and prostrating in its immediate effect, weakening in its results, and fraught throughout with an astonishing and horrible revulsion of feeling, was yet not one to destroy feeling through destruction of reason, nor annihilate pain by the extinction of life. This delicate fragile lady had passed the portals of a martyrdom more bitter than is the fate of her sex in its most disastrous calamities, and was slowly experiencing the consciousness which is the more vivid sign of pain, permitting of reasoning upon the origin and cause. Those long, weary hours when she was lying there thinking, with the keenest sensibility, seemed fraught with that intense despair utterly beyond the pale of hope. It was when she was alone, and the kind friend whose ministering seemed so infinitely tender had gone about her household duty, that she suffered thus. As frequently as those duties would permit, Mrs. Evans sat by the bedside, holding her friend's hand with soft compelling solicitude, and so great was the delicacy of her sympathy those seasons were endued with helpful restorative influence. It would be difficult to relate how finely this gentle lady's sensitive condolence came in at this crisis. She asked no questions, and did not burden the invalid—the common error of their sex—by recounting all her own sorrowful experiences, although she had more than enough sad memories of her own.

It was the morning following the events described in the last chapter, and Mrs. Evans was busy at her household duties, while Bertie sat by the window reading. Looking up from his book, Bertie saw their famous neighbor, the Minister, unlatching the garden gate, and with him a little girl. He hurried to the kitchen to tell his mother, who was making some jelly, but she placed this on one side for a moment, while she went to the door. Mr. Garland greeted the lady with the kind consideration usual with him; she noticed, however, that his voice was tremulous. He explained sufficient in a few words to enlist her most careful assistance, and while he waited below she took the little girl up stairs, and placed her for a minute or two in a room adjoining that of the invalid. The latter, with susceptibilities sharpened, noticed the change upon the face of her friend, although it was but transitory; she had, moreover, heard the sound of visitors at the door. "What is it?" she asked, with breathless dread and expectancy, which will be readily understood and sympathized with. The other, preserving as calm a bearing as was possible, said:

"Merely the visit of a friend, dear, to inquire how you are this morning; do not let it disturb you." How much the eyes tell at these instant periods! Mrs. Travers, raising herself with excited, eager nervousness, begged to be told who it was that had called. And her friend gently replied, "One you will be so relieved to know is well, and to have with you; your little girl has been brought from London to bear you company."

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Travers, sinking back, a glad light playing upon her face. She had indeed, as her friend knew, been exceedingly distressed on account of her child, although believing her safe at Sir Horace Vivian's. Mrs. Evans was greatly rejoiced and encouraged by that sunnier gleam, and presently said,

"I will bring Ella in, shall I?"

The other gratefully assenting by an inclination of the head, her friend went to Ella and told her that her mamma was delighted to hear she had come, and anxious at once to see her. Mrs. Evans then returned to the Minister, aware that the little girl would perform her mission best alone.

Ella closed the door noiselessly and advanced with the lightness so remarkably her characteristic, and knelt down by the bedside as softly, while her fingers stole bird-like to those trembling hands put out toward her. Her mother was crying and could not speak, and the child preserved the attitude of simple devoted love, until she was more composed. Then she said, faintly,

"It is a great comfort to have you with me, darling; I have prayed for this."

"Dear, dear mamma, why did I not know of it sooner? But I have come now to nurse and make you well, and you will soon be stronger; then we shall be happier than ever before; really and truly, dear mamma," looking with bold confidence in her mother's eyes, and sending a curious thrill to her soul. There was a depth of assuring eloquence that carried greater weight than a more labored introduction would have done. To the child's astonishment her mother seemed to read her very thoughts, raising herself slightly upon her elbow and looking with terrible wistfulness in her little girl's eyes.

"Ella dear, what has happened since we met, your face seems beaming with joy?"

"How can it help, mamma, being again with you? But I have something very sweet to tell you presently, dear."

Her arm wound caressingly about her mother's neck, and by a lovely action she drew the throbbing head toward her, laying a little hand cool and soft upon the temples. This control and the firmness soothed and lulled the eagerness and emotion. Ella felt all the imminent hazard of the time, and preserved that gentle repose with an effort of will that confirmed the opinion Constance had formed. The life of this beloved mother was trembling in the balance; it was a time when words even might break the agonized spirit upon the wheel. The child tried to keep her heart's beating back, and to stay the quick breathing that she feared fanned the dear one's cheek too tremulously. With the tenderness of old with which she had been wont to lightly smooth her mother's hair when the head ached, she now passed her hand with tranquillizing movement over the soft bands, and was startled to notice since doing so last some streaks of silver had appeared. The action, electric, and from a child's hand the best banishment of pain, now assuaged the feverish vibrating pangs that with every pulsation seemed to dart from heart to head. The little girl continued her re-assuring, quietly restoring influence, and she could feel a gradual calmness and lessened throbbing, could see the hectic flush grow lower, the terrible glitter in the eyes become subdued.

Then, carelessly as possible, and still without timidity, Ella said,

"You have told me sometimes about a cruel enemy with whom papa had quarrelled, and who brought us to sorrow—"

"Yes"—looking up with affrighted suddenness at the very mention of him.

"That unhappy day when poor papa left us he met this man and another in the lane leading to the sea, and it was through them it happened. They would have gladly seen him drowned; but

God saved him, to return to us after doing the work He saved him for. You know of it, dear mamma, but do not know all the truth; for when they found he had been saved, they schemed to rob him a second time, and again to make people think the worst. And in this you were to be included."

The child paused here, to allow her earnest words to be grasped. She had spoken with a simplicity and depth of feeling which carried conviction with them. A mere child, unversed in eloquence, yet using words in themselves of meaning; briefly expressing the child's summary of the drama, without logic possibly, but plentiful with pathos, and uttered without once by tear or tremor giving cause for emotional display. And although inwardly agitated, Mrs. Travers preserved her feelings overcoming her in an outburst of tears, for she grasped the office her little girl had accepted, and the child's presence of mind acted restrainingly, she felt so for her at this painful time.

Seeing her mother continue calm, grateful for it and more happy, Ella resumed:

"You remember Lady Guilmere, the lady of whose goodness we so often used to hear? Well, papa was saved by her servants, and was taken to her house. When well enough, her ladyship persuaded him to become a minister, and the opportunity was offered of doing so in Brighton. Of course papa's first thought had been for you and me, but for a time he yielded to Lady Guilmere, who advised him that greater service would be done to all of us by his making his way alone. But he could not live on so, and hurriedly sent for us, to Devonshire, and to Hertfordshire, thinking grandpa would be moved by his rumored death to provide for us at the court. And when we could not be found his sorrow was so great that he felt sure he had done wrong. And he has not ceased to feel so, or to try to find us; but it seemed we were to be parted for a time, dear mamma; and won't it make us love him more now than ever in our life before?"

This was said with so glad a delight and with so innocent an air, the mother, with a passionate impulse, caught the child to her heart, while repeatedly kissing the white brow. She held that pretty head firm: it had been bravely thinking for them; she was of old in darkened days the comforter, she was now the restorer of her peace; and she held her there with an intense thankfulness to God that through all the shifting vicissitudes that had befallen them the child was left to her, and not this only, but had been sent to her as the messenger of life, of love, and peace.

Half shyly, and with a piquant bashfulness, Ella leaned from her a moment to ask, whisperingly,

"You know papa is down stairs waiting? And suffering all this time! Shall I go to him now, mamma, and say— Well, do *you* tell me *what* to say."

From this exquisite, playful and serious, glad yet sad, entreaty there was no escape.

"Say that mamma thinks you have succeeded, darling, in making her feel better and happier; and ask papa to come to me at once."

The little girl went down to him, and with as nice delicacy told him, adding *that mamma was smiling.* How a little thing—so ridiculous a trifle to those out of the circle of suffering—will reassure! The man was deadly pale with anxious suspense, and she came to him with news of that smiling, and what an awful weight was lifted, and how he thanked God!

He entered the invalid's chamber with a light step, a re-assuring manner, and a presence that carried with it in reserve ample and satisfactory explanation of all that was doubtful and distressing. He knew this would be gathered from his manner with the instant sensitive quickness of the sick and mentally suffering. Without affording her occasion to utter a word, he said, with grave, loving earnestness:

"Every thing shall be explained, my darling, without delay beyond the interval necessary for you to recover calmness and confidence. You will understand all immediately. Be tranquil, create faith in me for a few minutes, the better to sympathize with my explanation."

The firmness which the gentle dominion exercised, the composed thought which this presence of mind compelled, the evident stanch faithfulness to honor and to love—implied more by the tone of voice than by the words—all evoked the sympathy he had desired.

A beautiful smile rendered the delicate face so exquisite he could not restrain the love moving him to the soul, and he leaned tenderly forward to kiss her. She took his hand, holding it all-fondly on her breast, yet with great timidity, as half apprehensive either of its changed warmth or its lowered truth, or even of the reality of this wonder being genuine, and not one of those mocking fancies which had so often tormented her after the loss of Lionel.

Summoning such composure as was possible, he sat down by the bedside, and in a low voice commenced the narration, which he made brief and pointed, yet complete, using infinite delicacy, but with such wealth of love breaking through it, wherever allusion to herself and their child occurred, that it seemed to soothe and heal in the telling, and restore by the very evolving of motive and purpose. Her whole attention was absorbed as soon as the dangerous point at the beginning, when his course was first entered upon, was passed, and, if not thought reasonable or right, that course appeared, at least, to be actuated by good motives and for just ends; then, from enchaining her solicitude, and, as he proceeded, winning her heart-felt interest, he (with the eloquence of which he was a master, and which had never been directed in more tender or more moving channels) attracted the sweet union of her forgiveness and assent. With the progress of the relation, its connection with Constance became apparent, and his wife experienced upon her side one little pang of remorse that she had permitted herself to lend belief to the gross calumny; but then, as she comfortingly thought, this would not have been but for that other overwhelming revelation of her dear one *living.* Very touching was this reconciliation which his loving, delicate earnestness thus effected, brought out of so untoward material, that would bear extenuating and analyzing to every living soul except a wife; yet by his rare tact and refined, ingenuous forethought and control made exceptional, high, and ennobling even to her.

And when he had finished the strange chronicle, had told of the self-denial for others, the lofty purpose in his heart from the beginning, and had depicted all the bitterness of the sorrowing loneliness and unceasing regret, she evinced no impatience that it had been kept from her, and gave him a forgiveness so full and unrestrained its generous love moved him to the soul, and falling upon his knees by her bedside, he caught her hand, clasping it, while his face was bowed above that tender grasp.

"Go to Constance, dear, and tell her all is well; that troublesome mysteries are accounted for, and to my satisfaction."

"May I?"

"Certainly, I wish it."

He went, and Constance came to her; the sweet face bringing sunshine with it, and the remembrance of old days so vivid it seemed to hang this new happiness with a picture of that time, veiling all the sorrow since. There was such clear and candid beauty, she had been well likened to Evangeline and the peerless Elaine; and no one looking thereon could doubt the purity and sincerity that were the lights behind.

Constance came to her, and then she might weep unchecked; tears would relieve. The feeling heart of Constance beating responsive measure, while her tears fell also; compassionate sympathy and loving regard for her friend caused this meeting to be very affecting to her.

"And we shall really possess the old home again?" It seemed so amazing after all that dread ordeal connected with its loss, and with yearning for confirmation of its momentous and happy meaning, Mrs. Travers looked in the girl's face eagerly.

"Yes, dear, so soon as you are well enough to bear the journey."

"Then you will find me get well quickly."

"You should do so, with the tender nursing that will wait upon recovery. I shall be often here, Ella will not leave you, and the lady below is—"

"Mindful as a sister, and so good; no reward would be acknowledgment for the considerate delicacy with which I have been tended."

Below, an interesting conversation upon this subject was passing between the Minister and Mrs. Evans.

"Any mention of recompense for the kind care shown to my wife would, for its utter insufficiency, be insult, therefore I do not think of it for a moment; but if our friendship will—"

"No," said the lady, quickly, unconsciously glancing at the beautiful child sitting thoughtful and still, yet with a face of an infinite eloquence; "we can make no new friends; we do not visit nor desire visitors. The little I have done has been such as we would do for a stranger again with readiness, but with reluctance, if in return the service created friendship it is neither convenient to maintain nor prudent to encourage."

And at that, recognizing under its plain speaking the depth of motherly solicitude, the Minister, far from being offended, appreciating its candor and forethought, replied, with graceful yielding to her opinion, "I have a proposal to make of which I have been thinking with some earnestness, and hope to gain your sanction for the project: you would sorrow to be parted from your son, or I should like to place him at college; but if you will permit me to provide him with a tutor at home, I shall be very glad—a gentleman of your denomination, whose learning and courtesy would make him an agreeable companion, and who might, if you please, reside at the Grange. If without hesitation or embarrassment you will accept this slight return service, I shall feel very grateful; we shall neither then be under an obligation, and friendship will be—well, possibly something in the dim future, when years shall have fled and—"

"Mothers will less need the care that is all the world to them?" asked with instant yet not displeasing anxiety for that time. Then adding, gratefully and with emotion, "But how *can* I thank you for this delicate proposal? My heart is too full to do so; my boy is so dear, so very dear! Dare I say that to accept it would be very welcome, after my recent unsociable and, as you must think, cold remark?"

"I understand, Mrs. Evans, and am quite in sympathy with it; such sincerity and such foresight are but too rare. I highly commend the spirit which prompted you so to speak. And now, without a word of remonstrance, you must please allow me to do as I wish." And holding out his hand with a warm frankness denoting unmistakably the friendship upon his side, the agreement was ratified, and the Minister returned to his invalid, where he discovered with pleasure two more friends likewise upon the best of terms.

Now that the ice had been broken, he could sit down and talk happily and unreservedly of the future; of the past enough had been said.

And when her child came nestling by her side, so serene an expression of content and freedom from pain lighted up the invalid's fair face, they hoped it would not be long before she would be well enough to go down stairs.

The mind has much to do with restoration to health; the mind at rest and in perfect peace is a greater physician than any wealth can summon to aid recovery. And this gentle lady, who had been so prostrated, mended thenceforth, and every day saw renewal of strength and revival of brighter spirits. Those watching so eagerly were unflagging in their kind attention, and not least of the incentives toward the lighter train of thoughts was given while the Minister sat reading, with his own thrilling yet attuned eloquence, from the famous writings as yet not read by her. Those were proud moments, resting back listening to that voice that seemed of more melodious depth than ever, and following the rare pictures his genius had painted, until the confines of the walls of a sick-chamber seemed to fall down, and the trammels of a poor body's weakness to pass all away. So another life revived; and to him, reading with lowered tones, and often glancing from the book to the face so still, yet with the smile unfaded, this seemed, indeed, the triumph over wintry seasons.

When convalescence enabled her to spend the first day down stairs, she seemed greeted by invisible kisses from numberless flowers, and when the first walk out was taken, she appeared to be supported by angels. Her strength came back as though glad to come; the color re-tinted her face, and the Minister thought the journey might be attempted. They were all so eager to get back to the old home; and he believed it would, more than any thing, joined to the healing air, tempered from east winds and variable changes, assist in the regaining of health and strength.

He had been busy during the probation time fitting up the Grange with greater comfort in readiness for their return from Devonshire, when he would resume the work of the ministry with new zest, and yet stronger love for its high office and capacity for good. In this he would now be assisted; knees would no longer be feeble or hands droop, while a wife's encouraging sympathy made the life beautiful.

His neighbors, the tenants of the farm nearest the Grange, had been friendly disposed toward him, and now, while the old place was undergoing renovation, were eager with offers of those little courtesies people in out-of-the-way places do sometimes render one another. Additional interest attached to the circumstance through their niece having been kind to little Ella in the time of that perilous captivity in the house of Bartholomew Rolf; and the Minister, grateful beyond describing to any who had shown kindness at the period of their trouble, when the girl was recognized by Ella, at once inquired into this change of scene. It appeared Mrs. Rolf had written to her brother-in-law to say that in consequence of Bartholomew having got into a little temporary trouble she was compelled to take a situation where she could not have Edith with her, and did they mind having the child at the farm. Now this was John Lessie, the brother of that unfortunate individual whose run of ill luck upon the turf has before been commented upon. John Lessie was as steady and quiet-going as his brother was the reverse. Miss Ruth, his sister, who managed the house, was a genial, homely soul, kind of heart and fond of children; an astonishing knitter of worsted stockings, rearer of poultry, and cultivator of rose-trees. Well liked and much respected in the village, this pleasant woman of mature years often wished their home held some sunny-faced boy or girl, if but for company; and when the letter came from the widow of that wild brother whose name was seldom upon their lips, and who had often clouded their peace while living, she overruled John Lessie's scruples and set her heart upon the project. True, they neither knew any thing of the writer; they had heard in years gone by that she was fond of dress, and scarcely appeared in garb that was becoming, according to their old-fashioned notions, but of the woman personally they knew absolutely nothing; and it was scarcely worth while commencing the acquaintance thus late in the day, thought the cautious farmer; which need not affect taking their brother's child, pleaded the warm-hearted aunt. She wanted something to love, and was prepared to love this girl, be the parentage good, bad, or indifferent. They wrote consent, and Mrs. Rolf, who had accepted an engagement at a notorious place of al-fresco entertainment on the outskirts of London, was greatly relieved in consequence, for she loved Edith too well to wish to take her with her in the new sphere of livelihood. A livelihood with this lady represented unlimited beverage, free license of manner, extravagance of apparel, and male society liberally suffused with the stable, and she would rather Edith was out of it. It was the one and the only good deed of her life, and of it an immortal soul would perhaps be saved. The girl quitted the heat, smoke, spirits and water, licentiousness, quarrelling, trickery, meanness, and lies, to which she had been accustomed and steeped in all her life, and came to the quiet village, there to learn purity from the valley lilies, grace from a grove of bluebells, modesty from retiring violets, innocence from the daisies scrolling the slopes of downland as with a new and delightful language, and early hours of the delicate pimpernel. And the glimpse now and then of the Minister's little girl excited the ambition to resemble her in those graces of character which made this child lovable and admirable.

Before leaving, the Minister intrusted the keys of the Grange to John Lessie, who promised to overlook the work and communicate to him the progress.

On the eventful morning of departure Constance was very pale, and, the Minister saw, was suffering. Robert Evelyn came over in Mr. Garland's carriage, and the four would proceed so far as Brighton, where Constance was about to return to her father's house. Mrs. Travers, with tender thought, proposed that Constance should be solicited to accompany them to Torquay, and would really have been glad of her friend's company, but the Minister shook his head doubtfully, and, for her sake, declined to put the request.

And when Mrs. Travers affectionately pressed her hand, saying, "We shall think of you, dear, and you will think of us!"

"Yes," replied Constance, with a quivering lip, and—

> "That faint pink smile, so sweet, so cold,
> Like a wood anemone."

Then followed a word with the Minister while his wife and Mrs. Evans were interchanging farewells.

"We need not be strangers, when I return with renewed vigor to my work. I hope you will come and hear me often, and be very much with us in our home."

There was a beautiful light in the girl's eyes while looking up into his. "I shall never miss in my attendance at church, but shall be too busy with my household duties to visit very often."

Her friend took a small case from his pocket, upon the velvet within rested a magnificent gold chain and pendant in the form of a diamond cross. "Accept this, Constance, in memory of your kind sisterly support and sympathy when I stood literally alone." It was very beautiful, and even though one of his dear smiles was more priceless in her eyes, she accepted it as his gift, to be treasured for a lifetime.

The journey was performed by pleasant stages, and the invalid was less fatigued than they feared would be the case. It was going home—there is all in this. Home! How the hearts of the three were thrilled at sight of the garden gate, standing wide open like the first word of welcome, taking them back into the boundary that had been their world of happiness; and if the world had widened to them they loved this none the less.

The mansion had been transferred as it stood, costly furnishing, elegancies, extravagancies, luxuries surpassing any they had ever been accustomed to; it was Sir Kinnaird Dalton's generously characteristic mode of testifying to his gratification at the happy turn of events. "I can well afford it," he wrote, "since you have relieved me of my clever but decidedly unpleasant secretary, who is bound, he tells me, for India." The transformation the interior had undergone exercised a cheering influence upon the mind; its immediate effect was healthful, the banishment of all that could recall old sorrows was so complete; not a wall, door, ceiling, or window but had been altered and beautified, and the feeling experienced was that of returning to one's home after it had, as Ella put it, been changed by the fairies into a palace. The garden, however, remained unchanged, and they were glad of this: after many years' acquaintance one grows to love the shape and station of every flower-bed, flower, and shrub. And they were on the right side of the year for its blossoming wealth, and in odorous summer evenings mother and child would swing laughingly there to music, in a dainty shower of rose leaves thrown by a man's strong hand. The setting sun was tinting the old terraces and statues upon their arrival, and the fountains curled gracefully, almost merrily, and tossed rose-hued gem-like spray in their path, while the trees seemed tinted with gold, familiar foliage and well-known boughs, all greeting them with the most cheering expression it is possible for such to wear.

The Minister's servants from Hawkingdean had been sent on before, and awaited them with respectful attentiveness. They would receive little or no company; these maids therefore would form sufficient establishment according to their changed ideas. Of old it was very different.

A large official-looking missive had arrived before them; it was a draft of apology and vote of confidence, drawn up by the church-wardens and very numerously signed by his parishioners. It conveyed their regret at the misunderstanding to which they had lent themselves, with a full assurance of the most loyal faith in their pastor; it witnessed to the good wrought by his ministry, and the deep sense entertained by all classes alike, of his unwavering self-denial and philanthropy. He valued the production at the rate this man would be likely to attach to all such veering of the vane; nevertheless, it served to show that public opinion was pacified, and that the aspersions upon his fair fame had been but a nine days' injury. This was no doubt in part due to his prompt and decisive action in the matter.

By the evening's post the Minister received also a few lines from Mr. Barnard, inclosing that note purloined from Miss Turner which was dropped by Mr. Garland in the church, of some importance at that time, since it was a letter of friendship and gratitude for the education Constance had received, written by Robert Evelyn from Torquay, and addressed to Lionel Travers. The lines accompanying it were as follows:

"I return you the last piece of property belonging to you now in my possession. I start for India shortly. Going in for increase of business, hot pickles and condiments. Excuse haste; have to be here, there, and every where, and time presses.—N. B."

CHAPTER XLV.

BERESFORD COURT.

The winter drawing-room at Beresford Court.

Beresford Travers, Esq., Mr. Herbert Garston, and Mr. Penfold, a solicitor.

A very large room, where two old-fashioned fire-places scarcely warmed the space, yet imparted a cheerfulness atoning to some extent. A dusky, richly furnished, heavily leathered and draped, sumptuously comfortable old drawing-room. Those massive chairs were of a type money could not procure at the present day; they had been there in the father's and grandfather's time. Mr. Travers would on no account have permitted the removal of one even from its historical position in the room. Mr. Travers was conservative in the matter of the ancient landmarks, within as well as without the house, and, from the line of old portraits to the cellars of old wines, knew the pride which the possessors of such heir-looms alone can know. It had been a terrible blow when Lionel's supposed death was broken to the old gentleman by Mr. Penfold, the faithful friend of the family for many years, and Mr. Travers had never recovered the shock of it. That there should be a possibility that the names of BERESFORD and TRAVERS should perish with their honor, be held up to public pity, written down by some Landed Gentry or Peerage compiler, remembered by the old families of England as no longer one of themselves, or the court and park pointed at as once belonging to them, but now—to whom? It all rendered the old gentleman acutely sensitive; he could not reveal to any the mingled remorse, sorrow, pain, and disappointment at his heart, but was grave and composed under the trouble in his latter days.

The attached, warm-hearted friend and his mother were staying on a visit at the court. From the first they had relaxed no effort to bring about the restoration of Mrs. Travers and her child in the old gentleman's regard. It would at least provide a loving companionship—in Herbert Garston's opinion a very fair consolation for any amount of trouble.

Mr. Penfold had recently arrived, had lunched, and requested permission to lay before his esteemed client some lately acquired data of interest.

"First, Sir, any news of my poor ward?" It was with tremulous eagerness, yet as scarcely daring to hope for a favorable reply, that Mr. Beresford Travers put the all-important question.

"None, Sir." Mr. Penfold was very pointed in matters of business, and did not agree with prolonging suspense by a word. It was upon one occasion Mr. Penfold's pleasure to acquaint an unsuspecting but decidedly needy individual of the demise of a relative, with his accession to large possessions: the solicitor made short work of it, thus: "Uncle deceased! Yourself heir! Considerable property! Condole with you! Congratulate you!" Shaking hands with the approved legal movement customary under the circumstances.

Mr. Travers knew his solicitor, and simply bowed.

"Ran down to acquaint you with data *in re* Noel Barnard and others. Gang of four! Trading in Friday and Cursitor streets; Merchandise and Money! Business conducted upon legitimate basis; difficult party; one of them at the head of a bank! Bogus attorney, connected!"

Mr. Penfold pronounced the cautious piece of strategy with immense disgust, and as though he might have said, "Combine the four Courts of Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas, and Exchequer, and they won't circumvent this precious four with their bogus attorney."

"You are, of course, alluding to the principals," said Mr. Travers. "At the back of these are instruments of their villainy."

"I allude to the responsible ones, with whom we have to deal; the collapse of these involves dispersion of their abettors. This Barnard is a person of ability, and it may be impossible to bring him under coercion owing to the *point d'appui* of his defense being the law. Such a being would snap his fingers at any mittimus granted by any justice in the civil realm."

"I agree with you, Sir, he's an out-and-outer;" and Mr. Garston champed desperately with ever-increasing warmth.

"Sir," replied the solicitor, measuring his words leisurely, "all my experience in civil, common, and statute law has not introduced me to so obstinate a case. From the ramification it would be considered easy to effect a seizure; but as the law stands, it is a matter of delicacy—"

"Yes, I *would* stand upon delicacy with the scoundrels," interrupted the younger gentleman, vehemently.

"You misapprehend my meaning, Sir," explained the solicitor, politely.

"I think my friend understood your meaning, Mr. Penfold, but his warm interest and sympathy betrays him to ironical expression of his contempt;" and with a kind, affectionate smile, Mr. Travers reclined in his easy-chair. The whole affair disturbed the reposeful grace of his years and the tranquillity of his nature, and it was eminently distasteful.

"I appreciate Mr. Garston's co-operation, as I am sure any one would, Sir; it is a pleasure to meet with a gentleman so little disposed to let the grass grow under his feet when absorbed by a pursuit of this nature. As a rule, men are indolent where the interests of another are concerned." Thus the solicitor, accepting his client's remark with becoming grace.

"I have to slightly amend that observation, Sir," said Mr. Garston, emphatically. "The inquiry does concern me, very deeply so. Lionel Travers was my best friend. Much as I love Mr. Travers, I loved his son better; my interest and sympathy, as you call it, represent devotion to his memory. Were Lionel Travers to be restored to life again, I could meet my friend with an honest brow, conscious of never having once forgotten him, ay, and of having given my all in the endeavor to clear his honored name."

"God bless you!" murmured the old gentleman. His face was turned from the speakers, and he was much affected.

Mr. Penfold coughed a little, dry, office cough. He was accustomed to cough when necessary to intimate to an overcome client that time and law will not wait upon sentiment. "You will excuse my returning to the indictment; unfortunately *necessitas non habet leges*. We have no grasp of this person's present; he is literally within the pale of the law; our station must be, is the supposed crime *in esse?* If not, we are the weaker; a presumed *scandalum magnatum* has no validity until corroborative evidence is established."

"Such confounded villainy needs no corroborative evidence!" cried Mr. Garston, excited by the lawyer's coolness.

"I am sure you will pardon me," explained Mr. Penfold, with deliberate civility; "nothing in criminal accusation can be established without corroborative evidence. The conspiracy to defraud, the plot to destroy, the after-scheme of abduction, are all suppositional on the part of my clients, and admit of no basis whereon the legal adviser can work."

"Then in mercy's name make one, Sir!"

The solicitor bowed, and with a dry smile, replied: "This is not a case of *ex facto jus oritur;* there is little or no fact to serve. Under these conditions we are forced to retrace. *Coram nobis:* a man of opulence, trading largely, in perfectly solvent concerns, head of a flourishing company: this all had a beginning, the prosperity had an origin, the man came from somewhere; that point is all-important before progress is made with the present. We may trip him with his past."

"It is generally believed," put in Mr. Garston, hotly, "that he was generated on the sands of India, the old serpent being his progenitor!"

"My dear Herbert!" murmured Mr. Travers, reprovingly.

"I beg your pardon, Sir; I thought for the moment I was out-of-doors."

"What difference would that make?" asked his friend.

"More space for words, Sir. But seriously, Mr. Penfold, your argument is good. I've been searching up his antecedents no end of time, and I have arrived at the satisfactory point of finding him every thing, every where."

"Lord Campbell, Sir, says, 'It is the business of courts reasonably to shape their rules of evidence,' not to exclude the actual facts. The address and the attainments we know this man to possess point to an earlier career of honor—"

"Do I understand you to be eulogizing the man, Sir?" asked Mr. Garston. "If so, I prefer to leave the room."

"Not at all," answered the lawyer, mildly; "I was about to deduce an inference. We can not, *absque tali causâ*, discover either an ignoble, an ignorant, or a criminal first cause; and to disintegrate or disintricate the promoting influences is at once the commencement of operations and the foundation of our superstructure."

"One of the reasons why I have tried to do without legal assistance, Mr. Penfold, has been my apprehension of the mystery in which things are at present shrouded being rendered still thicker. I am sure, out of regard for my altogether mediocre faculties, you will simplify as much as possible. As the Bard of Avon—whom I don't admire half so much as most people, but agree with sometimes—says in *King Henry VI.*,

> "'In these nice sharp quillets of the law,
> Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw.'"

Mr. Penfold smiled blandly. He was conscious of being wise himself, but experienced a certain humiliation under the reflection that that scoundrel O'Connor was a good deal wiser.

"The law, Sir, scarcely permits of the simplified phraseology which you prefer."

"Exactly; just the reason I dislike it; the plainer the speech the more honest, in my opinion. Reducing our position to plain speech it amounts to this—after all the time and money expended, we appear to be no nearer obtaining a clew to poor Lionel's death and the difficulties which led to it, or the cause of those difficulties; no nearer the clew to the disappearance of his wife and child, and their present concealment, supposing them still alive; and this is eminently unsatisfactory, Sir."

The family solicitor peered keenly under his shaggy eyebrows, drew his outspread hand thoughtfully down the short whiskers meeting under the chin, and replied:

"Nothing is so difficult to deal with as a complication of surmises, none of which fall under *lex non scripta* or *lex scripta.* Order and method regulate those movements contriving the release from the complication. You will recollect Feltham said, 'Laws were made to restrain and punish the wicked; the wise and good do not need them as a guide, but only as a shield.' You are by admission ignorant of the law, possibly happily so; it must therefore be left in the hands of those versed in its science and structure, and so long as law is law it will be slow of progress, consistent with its majesty of purpose." The solicitor vindicated the gravity of his periods with much feeling. This address only served to further excite Mr. Garston, who replied, hastily,

"I am not familiar with Feltham, but I do remember warm-hearted, honest Swift's remark, that 'Laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies, but let wasps and hornets break through.'"

The solicitor bowed, as though to imply there was no doubt whatever about the Dean having thus committed an impropriety. Mr. Travers had listened to the exchange of quotation with some amusement. His friend Herbert seldom quoted; when he did, it was always a more bitter sentiment than he would have thought of himself. "I think, perhaps," said the old gentleman, courteously, "Buckingham's apothegm may adjust the difference between you two—'However the law, to make it a mystery and a trade, may be wrapped up in terms of art, yet it is founded on reason and obvious to common-sense.'"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Mr. Garston, who was as fond of the last word as a Dutch market-woman; "but I would thank any law, and respect it, that effected an agreeable release from our difficulty."

"*Primâ facie*, insurmountable," said the solicitor; "calmly looked at, a matter alone of time and ingenious tracing out and following up, suspended during my research into antecedents, which indicates our strong line. It is useless to force this inquiry; the penetration of judicature takes its one course—minute examination and analysis, not cursory survey. True, there are instances of inquiries having been abruptly terminated by some sudden discovery or revelation, some *coup* the most profound of Chancellors would never have foreseen— God bless me!"

The exclamation was excited by the opening of the door; by there standing in the frame, as upon a life-size canvas, Lionel himself. The dusky, richly furnished, heavily leathered space between them and the doorway almost rendered the effect illusory—or might have done to any one but a family solicitor. Mr. Penfold certainly was astounded, and lost his habitual serenity. Mr. Travers looked up, turned round, started to his feet, and fell back again in the chair; it was so many years since he had seen his son, and the shock bedimmed his eyes. In the flash of the passing thought it seemed that from talking of his poor boy their fancy had wrought this shadowy appearance. It was Herbert Garston who, with giant strides, made for the door with unceremonious disregard of the Beresford and Travers furniture. He knew it was no phantasm, but, whatever the meaning and the mystery, his lost and much-loved friend. He almost pounced upon him, so huge was his joy, quivering with wondrous emotion; red in the face, mighty of grasp, bursting with magnificent delight, he seized his hand, and shook it until fragile Lionel could scarcely support this tremendous manifestation of rapturous surprise. Lionel's resuscitation affected the three in different ways; upon this warm-hearted, hot-headed, devoted friend it took exuberant effect. There was no control about Herbert Garston, any more than there was any nonsense, and he at all times allowed the genuine state of his feelings to become evident. It served to give time for Mr. Travers to recover himself, and thus, upon this occasion, was welcome. Mr. Garston dragged his recovered friend into the room, again caught his two hands, and almost wrung them off, pulled him more forward until in the space between fires, faced him about for the others to see—high of color from the violent exercise to which he had been subjected, and laughing at Herbert's tremendous enthusiasm, as the latter cried out to the solicitor, "Here's the best release from all our difficulty."

The two gentlemen came hastily forward to greet the restored one, the solicitor falling back a pace to permit his esteemed client to embrace his son. This Mr. Travers did with powerful emotion, his tremulous, broken thankfulness, wonderment, and solicitude dividing interjections with affecting entreaties for Lionel's forgiveness that in past days he should have behaved with enmity and pride, which he had since so severely repented, conscious that his son had never acted contrary to honor and a lofty sense of filial duty.

When he had recovered himself a little the solicitor came forward and shook Mr. Lionel very warmly by the hand.

"I congratulate you, my dear Sir. I will not say I was totally unprepared for this, but I must admit you have rendered the progress of our suit the utmost assistance in your power. At present we are in unhappy ignorance of the data *in re* your long absence, but we are satisfied when, *in propriâ personâ*, one we believed *civiliter mortuus* stands with us—"

"Hale and hearty!" interrupted Mr. Garston, with an affectionately admiring glance at his handsome friend.

"By a physical figure Mr. Garston conveys the meaning I could not better have expressed." Mr. Penfold was marvellously polite, considering he deemed Lionel had perpetrated a *ruse;* and a *ruse* outside the law partook so closely of the nature of a trespass that the worthy solicitor regarded it with strong disfavor.

Presently this party of gentlemen became more calm and better fitted for a little quiet family talk. From the origin, through the process to the sequel, Lionel recounted his history, and it was edifying to hear Mr. Garston exclaim—

"So many times has my mother begged I would take her to hear that Westley Garland! What a fool I have been! True, we never go to Brighton; but he has so often been in London. Forgive me, my dear fellow, but it does seem so aggravating!"

"I am very glad you did not," replied his friend; "you would not have taken things so quietly as did Sir Kinnaird the other evening in Brighton, whose greatest wonder seemed to be that I was not a doctor of divinity."

"And now, Mr. Lionel," asked the solicitor, "can you give us information concerning the gang that has troubled us so long?"

"The most satisfactory information I can give you, Sir, is, that it will trouble you no longer. One of its prime agents, the brutal tool upon whom devolved the more gross description of its work, is a fugitive from justice for a murder committed upon the highway in Sussex. The financial manager for the scoundrels is in the same predicament for heavy frauds and embezzlement of money. The chief of this black firm, with whom I have had at the last a sharp encounter, will leave immediately for India or a convict settlement."

"The latter, I hope," said Mr. Garston, devoutly.

"The only member left practicing is—"

"Yes?" asked the family solicitor, with an animation he seldom displayed.

"Their attorney, one Coke O'Connor!"

The solicitor sank back gasping—

"Then, Sir, your firm is not exterminated, nor ever likely to be. With Lucifer at one end of the world and Beelzebub at the other, how on earth is peace to reign or equity to flourish?"

"I always had an idea, Mr. Penfold," said Herbert Garston, with energy, "that equity flourished more conspicuously when peace was dethroned."

Seeing that their friend was disconcerted by this blunt passage at arms, the Minister, addressing his father with loving respect, roused his curiosity in some degree.

"I've brought a little present for you, my dear father, but as I saw Mrs. Garston sitting cozily by the fire as I passed the library, I have left it with her to be duly admired."

"I must go and see what it is," said the old gentleman, rising; he half guessed, and was thrilled with the pleasurable anticipation.

He found it there, upon a hassock beside the lady, and the sight of its little flushed face, beautiful hair tossed back from the white temples, eyes looking up, taking in himself so long thought of, pleased him, and he quite lost the dignity upon which he prided himself, stooping to his grandchild, an inmate of Beresford Court, then, after all. Mrs. Garston was rejoiced to see this display of affection. The lady had been the connecting link, friendly both with Mr. Travers and with his son, and she bitterly felt the estrangement, had often put in a word for Lionel and his beautiful child when staying at the court. She had deeply sympathized with the troubles, and terrible uncertainties succeeding the troubles, which had befallen the family; and when Lionel, with Ella, appeared at the library door, it had been a surprise and joy in one. He took her into his confidence first, having thus unexpectedly met with his old friend, and left Ella with her, thus spoiling his original little innocent scheme, which had been to allow the child to steal in unawares upon Mr. Travers and take him captive by herself.

Presently, after the departure of the solicitor, a happy circle gathered around the board at Beresford Court, only shadowed by the absence of Mrs. Travers, who was not yet strong enough to undertake a second journey; but Lionel's father announced his wish to return with them, and personally bear to his ward the message of his sorrow for the past.

And next to the reunion with his wife and recovery of his child, the reconciliation with his father was the event that gave greatest joy to the Minister.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CHEFFINGER DÉNOUEMENT.

High festival was being held at Cheffinger, the seat of Sir Dickson Cheffinger, Baronet, only recently and without litigation established in the home of his ancestors. It was the new baronet's own proposal that a general allowance should be paid annually to the late owner, and this he was wise enough to accept, without involving himself in the embarrassment of a losing contest.

And Sir Dickson, who would not have caused his greatest enemy a moment's pain, settled down upon his estates with a comfortable feeling, and that satisfaction experienced when the long waited for becomes with justice one's very own.

The slight excitement attendant upon the important results described did not serve to allay the chronic restlessness and eccentricity so peculiarly Sir Dickson's own, and he considerably astonished the servants of his predecessor, whom he would not discharge, when he informed them they would by no means have an idle time of it, as he proposed to entertain at Cheffinger large companies of those illustrious by birth and eminent by genius; in fact, he purposed extending right royal hospitality upon a larger and more select scale than their late master, and for the carrying out of which the utmost resources of the establishment would be taxed. There was grave communing in the servants' hall: they thought the resources *had* been pretty well taxed, and strong as was the staff of domestics, they contemplated excess of trouble with any thing but pleasure; and when one day Sir Dickson inadvertently let fall the remark that he had issued invitations to the number of eight hundred, a species of dismay spread through Cheffinger Abbey; and the retainers thought their former master, even if he was a morose man, or impetuously passionate as the mood took him, was more sensibly within bounds. However, elaborate preparations were made for the reception of the large company; and spacious as the Abbey appeared, it became problematical where the aristocracy would lay its head. The sleeping apartments were many, but the number of coming guests was beyond all reason; and the head servants, in conjunction with that important person the housekeeper, were troubled beyond measure to know what was to be done.

Unfortunately there was no hotel to which the unmarried gentlemen could be asked to resort, nor any neighboring mansion, the friendly family whereof might courteously extend hospitality; room must be found for them all at Cheffinger, and those in office were distracted. Several extra chambers were gained by fitting up rooms over the stables for the servants, while the repapered and refurnished apartments thus obtained were set apart for the unmarried gentlemen aforesaid. Naturally Sir Dickson bustled about, quiveringly alert, and as he grew more excited, the more excited became his assistants. Of course he was inordinately happy; hospitality was the one great observance of civilized life that gave Sir Dickson unlimited pleasure.

For so large a number of visitors great stores of delicacies and many wines were necessary, and the comptrollers of pantry and cellar had their hands full to inconvenience. A banquet was to be the foremost sign of the grand hospitality of CHEFFINGER, and since Sir Dickson considered the banquet the life and soul of genuine hospitality, he would set an example to some of these people of what English cheer and the cheer of CHEFFINGER should be.

"My guests," said Sir Dickson to himself, with sorrowful solemnity, "have often had to sit down to fare it has grieved me to see James place before them, but now that it is in my power, I will endeavor to make amends for all that my circumstances, not my will, have made me fall short of in the hearty cordiality I love."

Sir Dickson agreed with Edmund Burke, that "Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order, the Corinthian capital of polished society;" and he was determined to mark his admiration for the Corinthian capital by costly entertainment, possibly by altiloquence. The Cheffinger baronet was a philosopher with all his eccentricity, and the acme of his philosophy was that method of patrician regard which he carried to the extremity of sublime nonsense, but which, the more nonsensical in the eyes of the unsympathetic, was the more real to him. The board might gleam with cups executed in *pâte sur pâte sous émail* by Gely; with old Venetian schmelze glass; with Celadon vases, whereon the modelling was a revelation; and Chalcedony-agate work by Salviati of Venice; with Neo-Grec exquisiteness from the house of Barbédienne of Paris; with gems from the Josephinen-Hütte, near Warmbrunn; with the rare painting and crystal hues found but upon the Schaffgotsch specimens; and with the priceless ruby glass made by Kunkel, the chemist to the Elector of Saxony, seen now but in the possession of a few old families, whose dining tables it ornaments about once in each decade. The Cheffinger would display all this! The board should gleam from end to end of the long oak dining hall with the glass which had given the Abbey fame, and which, with the deer and the timber, was quoted in connection with the name. But it was not the glass, with all its splendor, that afforded in Sir Dickson's eyes the ultra-perfection of fitting reception at the table. It would have served for a mere ordinary gathering; but the party shortly to assemble demanded more elegant appointments. They saw glass in abundance elsewhere. He would introduce more sumptuous decoration and embellishment; the eight hundred should never forget CHEFFINGER! Time had been when its hospitality seemed kingly; that time should come again!

Thus the enthusiasm promoting such astonishing preparations occupied Sir Dickson with business from morning to night. He was in his element, and applied himself with a zest one would have scarcely credited his fragile constitution could hold in reserve. It did not, however, take a vulgar turn; if the board gleamed with glass, it should not groan with gold, valuable and antique as was that of CHEFFINGER. It was not a Guildhall feast he invited his people to; something chaste and more in accord with the taste of a Cheffinger—a grand regalement Epicurus might have deigned to attend. Sir Dickson detested meanness, and would give the lie to it at his approaching jubilee. He had endured much at the hands of meanness; he would settle that score with the superfluity of generous kindness of which his soul was full. He never forgot the nasty and narrow traits pricking one hither and thither, but his was a lofty type of nature, that, if it qualified him for Colney Hatch, enabled him not only to graciously forgive the world in lieu of bearing it malice, but likewise to extend a magnificence of welcome that should blot out the memory of it on both sides.

It was a critical time, a time of acute anxiety, as the day fixed for the arrival of the guests drew near. Sir Dickson waxed feverish; the honor of the name it was his pride to bear was at stake; the opportunity of making that honor more splendid than of yore was at hand. Sir Dickson trembled lest any thing should mar or prevent the carrying out of his arrangements.

What a change had come over his prospects, and how he had altered in his condition since those sad and poverty-stricken days when he entertained the noble and illustrious upon most sorry fare, but always to the best of his ability! "And even then," he said to himself, complacently, "royal dukes deigned to visit me, and sit at the poor table; what will they do now?" It was certain that Sir Dickson expected the attendance of royal, noble, and illustrious personages without limit, now that he had space and means to receive them. Among the guests invited there could not but be many altogether unknown to Sir Dickson, but he did not trouble about this; frigidness was not one of his fashionable qualities; and he was so in harmony with all men, that a stranger remained such but a very short time.

The information of the coming of royalty rather increased the excitement. The eight hundred and odd forming the expected party were considered sufficient tax, but when to these certain personages of more exalted station were added, it seemed the straw destined to break the back of that patient camel, ycleped the household.

The eventful day dawned, and immense was the agitation. It almost seemed that the very sunshine of that day was different to the usual beaming; the red deer herding beneath the distant trees, forming the attraction of the park view as seen from the mansion, were, to the impressed servitors, duly conscious of the importance of the day; and those old trees sheltering them were surely flooded with more radiance than usual.

Hours of the day slowly passed and nothing transpired; all were upon the look-out in anxious expectancy, so the time dragged tediously. The great banquet was ready for the great invited, but these seemed tardy, and Sir Dickson, care on his forehead, walked gravely the wide hall and terrace with a manner slighted and discomforted, but not with any loss of faith in the coming of the guests or in the guests themselves. All the hours between noon and even-tide the distant drive was eagerly scanned by many pairs of eyes, but no sign of the approach of a party, large or small, rewarded the diligent watchers.

Then a vehicle was discerned, but not a royal vehicle evidently, for one of the footmen said it was "a buggy!" Anyway it was an unassuming chariot whatever its name and style. To it was harnessed a horse—it might be the distance which reduced equine perfection, but to those on guard it looked decidedly bony. Upon the driver's seat was a man; they could not distinguish the man's quality, but it was remarked with disgust that he was not in livery, and that he wore a head-dress described by the same footman as a "billycock!" Sir Dickson saw the strange concern also, and hastily gave it as his opinion, to an attendant, that it was some of the luggage being sent on in advance. "We shall hear something now!" said the baronet, with a slightly solemn manner. And, as the strange conveyance approached, he breathed quick with impatience. The man who was driving was in no way intimidated by the spacious front of the Abbey or by the string of retainers upon the steps. Possibly he was accustomed to driving up to large places, or he may not have been of the impressionable order; it is certain he was not abashed by the architectural or personal glories of Cheffinger. He drove up to the front entrance, and jumping down from the box, hurried, with the unmistakable manner of the hackney cabman, to open the door for his passenger. A sallow-faced little woman alighted, with precise care that her best dress did not become soiled while she was getting out; it was a quiet gray-colored dress of no fashion nor style, indeed neat to a fault: she had linen cuffs over black kid gloves, a plain black bonnet above the gray bands of hair, a large gingham umbrella, and a small parcel done up in brown paper.

Poor Sir Dickson standing aghast, to the front of the scandalized retainers of CHEFFINGER, recognized his sometime landlady, the amiable Miss Turner, and he was very much perplexed; but his innate politeness, never entirely absent, prompted what his presence of mind neglected—he advanced to greet the lady, and invited her to enter.

Miss Turner, equally pleasant, reminded the baronet, in a low voice, of a request, and promise she had made during his sojourn in Brighton, but which, up to that moment, he had forgotten every word of. It was to this effect—when he was settled in his own house, she was to be sure and come to see him, in return for her attentive kindness while an inmate of her house. Sir Dickson had not settled the small account connected therewith, but promised to do so when Miss Turner called upon him; he also said that if she would do this, he should consider it a privilege to discharge the travelling expenses incurred upon the journey. And the plain-dealing, simple-hearted woman had thought much of this little plan, and ultimately decided to accept the invitation, made, she believed, in all earnestness, and came hither, bringing her bill, and that parcel, which Sir Dickson, with singular sensations, unfastened in the banqueting-room, Miss Turner standing by dazed and bewildered by the profuse splendor around. The brown paper removed, there fell out one pair of paper cuffs, a collar, a pair of carpet slippers, and a faded *Peerage.*

"You left them upon the chest of drawers," explained Miss Turner, quietly.

"I thank you, madam; I—"

Sir Dickson could say no more; he felt a choking at the throat; all the old painful time was revived by the sight of them, the weary, poverty-stricken era when CHEFFINGER—the dream of forty years—was the sole hope supporting him. Gratitude takes different modes of expressing itself; Sir Dickson's took this mode—waving his hand toward the splendid array, he said, seriously,

"I owe all this to your friend, the Minister."

Apparently it touched a responsive chord, for the pew-opener brushed some tears aside while bowing her head with sympathetic interest.

Miss Turner was introduced to the housekeeper at CHEFFINGER. The condescending airs assumed by this person did not trouble Miss Turner, who was very meek and naturally grateful, so that they got along pretty well together; and the baronet having announced the visitor as his friend, it guaranteed her respectful attention. But all this time Sir Dickson's anxiety was not allayed, and the imaginary guests did not, of course, appear. The time went on and the day drew in, the trees in the park became indistinct, the drive was lost sight of in a dim perspective, evening crept over the fair domain with a gradual abstraction of its beauties, and still the humble pew-opener remained the solitary guest at CHEFFINGER: surely such a jubilee never was known! But Sir Dickson was not going to be depressed by the discourtesy of those upon whom he had depended. If they lacked the fine breeding and polished manners of a Cheffinger, he might feel regret, but he could not feel surprise (for the Cheffingers were unapproachable); nor annoyance, for he possessed the pleasant consciousness of having done his best. He was scrupulous to do this at all times, and left the rest; he did it now, by ordering that the wax lights upon the banquet table should all be lighted and dinner be served for his visitor and himself; and a very elegant service it was, as may be imagined from the profuse choice. The host and his visitor sat alone at the board, and Sir Dickson's elaborate cordiality relieved both the isolation and embarrassment.

Sir Dickson had before this been charmed and won by the quiet, matronly, thoughtful manners, and the considerate regard shown by his whilom landlady for his comfort. He now had a further opportunity of observing those agreeable traits, and long before the evening was over felt within himself that he had never seen any one who so truly engaged his appreciative thought, always excepting the Princess, who had once flashed upon his dull life radiantly.

Thus Miss Turner helped to console the originator of the entertainment for what was at once a blow and disappointment.

"I've a very good mind," said Sir Dickson, "not to issue any more invitations. If people like to call, well and good; they will take us as we are, and if they choose to stop away they must do so. The worst of a man's entering upon his property late in life is that he is looked upon with suspicion, and not treated with the genial unreserve customary where he has occupied his estates all his life."

On the following day Miss Turner would have introduced her business, wishing to go to her own home; but Sir Dickson so persistently entreated she would make her stay a day or two longer, and she enjoying it so much, never having had a treat of the kind before, and feeling the change beneficial (it had been sorely needed, as she knew all too well before entering upon the long journey—she felt it the one and sufficient justification), she consented and staid on a while longer. But when the day of departure came, while standing in the great drawing-room to say farewell to her good-natured host, she thought, with a pang, of the splendor she was about to leave, the humble station to which she was returning, and she sighed, as the quietest and best may sigh sometimes without harm to any. The baronet heard it, faint though it was, and divined the cause; and CHEFFINGER was all too dear to himself not to sympathize with the regret of a visitor at quitting its hospitable shadow. And he had something else upon his mind.

Closing the doors, Sir Dickson returned with some mystery of manner to his pale, mild-eyed guest.

"You are sorry to leave us, Miss Turner?"

"Very, Sir Dickson. I shall ever remember your goodness with gratitude."

"Yes, at one time it wasn't in my power; I couldn't anyhow do as I would. Providence has conferred upon me all that was very justly mine own, and now that I am enabled, it is a pleasure to me to extend hospitality to my friends. You were especially good to me in the day of adversity, and I could see it was not altogether because I was recommended by the Minister. There was deeper thoughtfulness than comes of interest. Miss Turner, I esteem and appreciate the good qualities you possess, and believe they would grace any station and honor any person—will you become Lady Cheffinger?"

And the man they thought mad gallantly, but with profound respect, took the hand of the Minister's pew-opener.

It came with overwhelming surprise, and would have staggered the heads of younger and more giddy women; but this quiet person did not lose her presence of mind nor become bewildered at the view of the dazzling destiny open to her. To accept it she must resign attendance upon a ministry and its exponent representing far more to her than all the resplendent plate and glass, and jewelry and ancientry of CHEFFINGER. The diminutive little business house, with the apartments that would so seldom let, were thought of in a trice side by side with that honorable name and title she was asked to share by a man whom she really and truly liked (next to the Minister) better than any one she knew. Hers was a very plain, honest nature, and once like always like was the basis of it. Wealth and titles are not every thing to every woman, and depend upon it some of the quiet ones gliding on through life, well-nigh unnoticed beside their more attractive sisters, possess depths of self-denial, constancy, and endurance that would astonish us did we know all. Miss Turner thanked Sir Dickson Cheffinger with much feeling, and declined the honor he would bestow, but liked him none the less for it.

The baronet, nevertheless, perceived half-lurking partiality behind the diffident refusal, and moreover saw no possible reason why the lady should decline his offer. He had long recognized in her gentle ways and quiet demeanor graces that would become a duchess, and he modestly felt to possess qualities which would go well with these. Allied with this thought was one of wonderment that a person of Miss Turner's good sense could anyhow decline CHEFFINGER, if she declined himself. There must be some mistake somewhere! Sir Dickson repeated his proposal more persuasively, used manly and plain terms in harmony with the sincerity he loved and in compliment to the genuine character he admired; and she heard him without displeasure, but with corresponding freedom from affectation replied:

"I thank you, Sir Dickson, and beg you will not misinterpret the motive when I again say how earnestly I appreciate your goodness, but judge it proper to decline your proposal. The station I have filled has not fitted me for that to which you would raise me."

"On the contrary, Miss Turner, I could not select a lady from any station to my mind more honorable, while a long association with Mr. Garland can not but prove profitable to any person—it creates nobility—and while I can only confer poor earthly rank, he gives to one the dignity for all eternity."

Her eyes filled with tears at the thought, for she loved his high ministry all too well, and recalled with affecting emotion the precious guidance, solace, and encouragement that had so often fallen from his lips. To accept this offer would mean the loss of that, when, his much-needed vacation at an end, he would resume his exceptional mission. Noticing her more tender mood, Sir Dickson, with feeling, turned away for a minute or two, and it was not until she made a movement toward the door that he interposed. The quiet-looking gentle countenance, the quiet-looking gray gown, the quiet-sounding footfall, were too much for him; he might never discover one of her sex so quiet again, so delicately suitable to grace the honors of CHEFFINGER. He hastened to her side, caught her hand with gallant homage, yet with such evident respect, it wooed with the plea more directly from the heart than from the lips, and without resenting the gentle force or turning away her face, she smiled very kindly upon him, while saying, as one might say it to an importunate, inconsiderate one whose happiness is dear to us:

"You have not sufficiently weighed this matter. You are kindly impulsive and led away by a momentary appreciation of my peace-loving and unassuming disposition. Excuse my plain speaking; it is right at this time."

"And do you think a man who weighs for forty years that which should be his own is not accustomed to well considering matters? Ah, Miss Turner, you do not know all it is to stand isolated with one's thought, intensely lonely, without sympathy, yet with a heart full of affection, and a soul that would soar if it had but companionship!"

Oh yes, she did, and this appeal went home to her as none had done—she knew that feeling—a kindred nature stood by her, and it was more to her than degree, than wealth, ay, and as much as was charmed listening to the inspired eloquence of one who could never be more to her than the adorable teacher, the spiritual guide from narrow ways and weary cares to the higher rest. Miss Turner knew perfectly well that Sir Dickson Cheffinger was rather qualified by weakness than by strength, that he was as poor a mortal as herself by physical laws, and the worthy soul would feel really happier to know that he was well and kindly cared for.

"I can quite sympathize with the experience you describe, Sir Dickson."

"And you will try to alter it, will change your mind, will you not?" he pleaded, earnestly.

She was thoughtful an instant, and then, with a voice vainly struggling to be calm, she tremulously answered, "Yes."

Sir Dickson Cheffinger was exceedingly gratified, and when Miss Turner quitted Cheffinger Abbey, it was only to arrange for the disposal of her business and the election of her successor at the church. Mr. Garland was of course communicated with, and he expressed his satisfaction at the result of the friendship between his old friend and their much-esteemed helper in the past. Furthermore, he said it would give him pleasure to perform the interesting ceremony upon his return to his church.

He fulfilled this promise; and the resumption of duty caused friends and admirers to flock about him with flattering testimony to the regard in which he was held; and then, more than ever, the friend of the people, and still the quoted of the cultured, he knew a joy unknown to him before—a joy that caught its sunshine of the fair faces of those imparting the rarest delight and richest treasure upon earth, a loving wife and lovely child.

THE END.

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